

PC XBOX 360 GBA DS MOBILE PSP PLAYSTATION 2

FEBRUARY 2007 VOLUME 9 ISSUE 11

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

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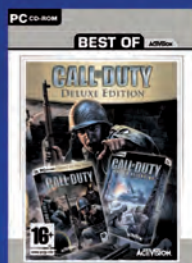
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- Soldier of Fortune (60259)
- Tony Hawk's Underground 2 (60260)

R99⁹⁵
EACH



ASSORTED GAMES

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PSP

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VIEW PHOTOS

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PLAY GAMES

R2 199⁹⁵
TERMS R131pm x 24 MONTHS

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EACH

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PlayStation.2

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R1 599⁹⁵
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PlayStation.2

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SAVE R100

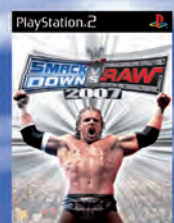


ASSORTED GAMES

- Black (51299) ► The Godfather (51300)



R199⁹⁵
EACH



WWE SMACKDOWN VS RAW 2007 (60295)

R549⁹⁵

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R229⁹⁵



R299⁹⁵ EACH



PlayStation.2



R299⁹⁵ EACH

ASSORTED GAMES

► Dance Fest (60566)
► Street Dance (60567)



ASSORTED GAMES

► Need for Speed Carbon Collection (59733)
► F.E.A.R. (60345)
► Tony Hawk's Project 8 (60228)
► Elders scroll IV Oblivion (59656)
► Marvel Ultimate Alliance (60121)
► Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07 (59732)
► FIFA 07 Soccer (59731)

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REGULARS

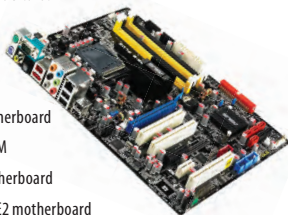
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ON THE DVD

DEMOS

Armed Assault | Eragon | Mount and Blade v0804

FLASH

Officers | Xpand Rally Xtreme

FREE GAMES

Foamy - Accidents

GAME.DEV

America's Army v2.8 Full | Open Arena | Sauerbraten

t_xna_part1_gt

t_xna_part2_gt

INDIE DEMOS

Eets | Fizzball | Gumboy Crazy Adventures

Kudos | Master of Defense | The Odyssey - Winds of Athena

Titan Attacks | Virtual Villagers

Counter-Strike Source | Big Surf Map Pack

MAPS

MODIFICATIONS

Battlefield 2142/2142 Unlocks v1.06 | Half-Life 2/Half-Life 2 Co-op v3.11 |

Half-Life 2/Smold Tactical Delta v3 | Half-Life 2/Smold v3.5

Neverwinter Nights 2/A Bizarre Bazaar | Oblivion/Oscuro's Oblivion Overhaul

Company of Heroes v1.2.0 - v1.4.0 | Generals Zero Hour v1.04

Neverwinter Nights 2 v100788 - v103840 | Railroads v1.10

Sims 2/Pets Body Shop | Warhammer Mark of Chaos v1.6

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Alpha Prime | Armored Core 4 | Blue Dragon | Crackdown | Crysis

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UTILITIES

Forza 2 Showdown | GT Countdown Dell Top 10 Graphics | Halo 3 Starry Night
Mass Effect | MotorStorm | Natural Selection 2 | Sam & Max | UFO Afterlight
Savage 2 - Announcement | Savage 2 - Assets Preview
Savage 2 - Beast Building Preview | Tomb Raider 10th Anniversary Edition
Flash to EXE | Google Earth | Google SketchUp | Picasa
Blender v2.42a | PaintDotNet v2.72



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buttons



Auto Light
Sensor



Bottom: easy to
upgrade

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|-------------------------|------------------------|
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| 2 1394 Port | 7 RJ45 1000/100/10MHz |
| 3 Serial Port | Ethernet LAN Port |
| 4 External Monitor Port | 8 Stereo Line-out Port |
| 5 Parallel Port | 9 Power Switch |



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W551N - Specifications

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Intel® 945PM / ICH7-M Chipset
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Intel 3945ABG Wireless LAN - Dual band antenna
10/100 BaseT Intel LAN, Built-in Bluetooth
NVIDIA GeForce Go 7400 128MB Graphics accelerator
15.4" LCD WXGA, 1280x800, 16.7M colors
DVD-Dual Optical Drive
Microsoft Windows XP Professional
Weight: 2.76 kg

THIS ISSUE IS THE first of a purge. Somehow, in the process of getting issues out, many games fell through the cracks. That's no good, especially because the reviews constitute one of the reasons why you spend forty bucks on the magazine every month. Therefore, we had to get that up to scratch and as such, this issue is bulging with forty-something game reviews. Okay, it's not an entirely fair count – a few of those are just short briefs inside another review (check the reviews to see what I mean). A lot of them are also half pages, but we had to make do in some way. Nevertheless, we still didn't manage to get everything in, so next month should be a bumper review issue as well. The other sections suffered for this and you'll count fewer features and reviews. However, the balance will be restored soon.



Another new section appears in this issue. Often a game will arrive just so late that it can't make it into a current issue. What you hold right now has been completed two weeks ago, that being the end of a two-month process in itself. Add a week to that for a decent amount of review time and that means a game is five weeks old when you read the review here. If it arrives a week too late, though, the review could be over eight weeks late, so we introduce *First Play*. This page, at the back of the review section, gives our brief first opinions of games we just started playing - so you can wait the four to eight weeks for our official opinion, or you can check out our gut feel for the more popular games currently in our grasp. You'll also notice a beefier hardware section. *Custom PC SA's* demise has been *NAG's* boon, and we're focused on making this section worth the while for all your hardware needs.

It's all about a bit of spring-cleaning. 2007 seems set to be a big year for games across the board with serious PC, 360 and PS3 games on the way. If the Wii ever arrives in SA, there will just be so much more to cover.

James Francis [Editor]



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LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Overload

SUBJECT: Less Console!!

I love your magazine and all the cool software notifications and hardware. But ever since your new editor has come, it seems that you guys over there at NAG seem to be very loving towards the console part of gaming. Let us not forget that gaming was created on the PC and now just because Sony and Nintendo seem to be thinking that console gaming can ever be competitive is absolute bulls***! I spit on consoles, they are merely toys for little poor kiddies! GAMING MUST STAY ON THE PC! If you don't believe me, then do you see CS on a console? Warcraft III? I personally don't like DoTA, cuz [sic] it's an old man's game but the point is that consoles a pieces [sic] of s***! But back to the point of this e-mail... Look at the 360 Insider. It was doomed because your readers read NAG for PC! Not some cheap-ass console f***-ups. Look at the DS an absolute f***-up, because I have one... So with all that said I'm sure I speak on behalf of most NAG readers and request that you review more PC games and stop that k**-ass console wars you are busy with, because no-one reads that!

Yes, we could have edited out the swearing, but somehow that would have robbed this letter of its passion. Okay, gauntlet thrown: we don't give the PC enough reviews. However, when we checked, not counting mobile reviews, in October, November and January, PC games were half or nearly half of the reviews. In this issue, sixteen of the reviews are PC. Now divide the total review count by the average amount of platforms reviewed in each issue (four). Therefore, in the past few months the PC hasn't been doing badly in terms of coverage. Look, we've heard your cries of dismay and the PC is getting even more attention than usual. Nevertheless, this is a multi-platform gaming mag – try and play nice with the poor console owners and their toys.

FROM: Syndey Butler

SUBJECT: Quality of writing

I have been reading NAG for a very long time and hold the opinion that there are no other sources of gaming related information that come anywhere close to matching either the scope or quality of your publication. That is, I have held that opinion until now.

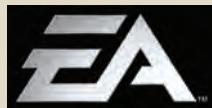
I have found another magazine that exceeds you, if not on the former point, then certainly on the latter. Ironically, it happens to come bundled in the same bag.

I am of course referring to 360 Insider. I cannot criticise NAG on any technical grounds, there are none locally that can provide material that is equally informative, but being informative, as you well know, is only half of the secret to successful writing.

360 Insider is an undeniable pleasure to read

compared to NAG. I find the tone and editorial style refreshing and almost completely lacking in the semi-biased tradition of many local magazines. Somehow I get the feeling when reading a 360 Insider article that the writer doesn't suck up to anyone and never overdoes the praises heaped upon good games; and most importantly, 360 Insider manages what no other SA gaming magazine can: a truly funny mix of cynicism and humour while always respecting the intelligence of its readers. I wasn't planning on buying an Xbox, but if it gives me a legitimate reason to read 360 Insider then my plans may have to change.

Phew! For a moment there you had us worried. We thought you were going to chastise us over poor writing or those times where we don't pay attention and parts of an article just disappears



The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by EA South Africa. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

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Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...

TOPIC FOR NEXT MONTH:

Does the platform matter or will you play a game on anything as long as it's a good game?



HUNDREDS OF GAMES THESE DAYS HEAP PROMISES ON THEMSELVES, THEN DELIVER ABOUT HALF OF THEM

into oblivion. Look, we might as well admit it. We conspired to kill 360 Insider. It was just setting the bar too high and there's no way we're going to interrupt our three hour lunches for anything. Miktar had to cut his manicure sessions down to two sessions a week while the Insider was around!

FROM: Hyslop

Subject: Games and hardware in 2007

So the topic question for next month was if we're looking forward to 2007 hardware and games. And my honest answer? Not really. Why? Because when they arrive, they'll just be a pile of unfulfilled promises and minor improvements. Don't think so? Think about it, it always happens. That letter "Gaming Conspiracy" in the December issue made a nice point: hundreds of games these days heap promises on themselves, then deliver about half of them. And then what happens? We give up and wait for the next one, that's what. And then the next one disappoints. And who's to say this year will be any different. Now, don't get me wrong, we'll all still love games, but what I'm saying is that this year is most likely going to be this one all over again, with a few technological advances. Change is one thing that won't be happening in 2007, that we can all say for sure.

Haven't games always been heaping promises that they can't all keep? It seems to be a nature of the development business.

FROM: Demonizer

SUBJECT: Pro-gaming how-to

Finally our time is at hand, fellow gamers unite! But the ifs, buts, and hows of pro gaming are scaring a lot of n00bs. Please NAG, lead our revolution and run an article on creating clans and entering a gamers' paradise of pro gaming. Let us know all the details and numbers and let the revolution begin!

Okay, get a pen. Here's NAG's Nine Steps To Becoming A Pro-Gaming Clan. First, find a competitive game to play. Second, find friends who play the same game. Three, re-enforce said gamers egos with compliments and neck rubs. Four, suggest you all start playing as a team, maybe with a name. Five, secretly tell everyone else you're a clan. Six, find people to play against at LANs (www.langames.co.za). Seven, keep giving the best player in your clan neck rubs. Eight, frag noobs until someone notices. Eight, enter and win a tournament. You are now a bona fide pro-gaming clan.

A TRULY FUNNY MIX OF CYNICISM AND HUMOUR WHILE ALWAYS RESPECTING THE INTELLIGENCE OF ITS READERS



FROM: David Kruse

SUBJECT: Poor Marketing tactics

I just thought I would alert [you to] the fact that on some DVDs you put old editions of your magazine in its entirety! Now don't you think that is unfair to the people who spend money on your magazine every month? From now on, I'll get my FREE magazine on the DVD without paying anything.

Did we know? To be honest, not really. The DVD's creation process is largely a mysterious one ever since we outsourced it to a really cost-effective outfit in Russia. Anyway, technically you need to buy at least one mag to get the free ones, so we get something at least. Also, PDFs are nice, but unless you lie in bed with a monitor on your chest or feel comfortable with a laptop on your naked lap while on the loo, we reckon the magazine is still a more flexible option.

FROM: Christopher Human

SUBJECT: RIP Point and Click genre

If you think about it there have been less than five 'point-and-click' games made in the past five years and their prices were around R200 (which is cheap as far as new games go) and not many places stocked the games (and if they did, they stocked one or two copies maximum).

If you think about it then you can see why 'point-and-click' games are now an oddity. There is no 'immediate action' or 'direct user involvement' to really speak of (i.e. blasting of monsters, running etc.) compared to games like *Prey*, *Warcraft* etc. The games require patience in order to successfully figure out puzzles and complete the game; and many people either don't have the patience required or just want to complete a game quickly and without too much effort. Although 10-20 years ago there were an abundance of adventure games, this was because they were simple to program, didn't require fantastic/3D graphics and were designed for fun only. On the other hand, I don't understand why they aren't made anymore.

Even though the 'point-and-click' genre is pretty much dead, I still think it has had a great journey/evolution. These games started as 2D pixels and were made before the mouse was invented and required keyboard input for commands. After the mouse was introduced, the 'point-and-click' genre was born. The genre then made the difficult transition from 2D to 3D, where in some cases it worked.

Alas, RIP 'point-and-click' genre, I knew you well.

This is one of the reasons why we are so interested in Telltale Games and its adventure titles. Sure, even the latest Sam & Max is far from the glory that was Kyrandia or Monkey Island, but it looks like those games might get the genre out of the rut it's still stuck in (despite great titles like the Broken Sword games and Dreamfall). Fortunately, there are a lot of good free and cheap indie adventure games around, so the genre is not dead, just underground.

FROM: Wurn

SUBJECT: Gaming OS

I was thinking about OSs and wondered why Microsoft never came up with a gaming OS. They could even use the Xbox 360 OS and convert it to run on a PC. They could sell it for far less than Windows XP, and still make money without having to spend too much development time on it. They can give it only limited functionality - like running DirectX for gaming (obviously) and Media Player, MSN Messenger and so on. Basically a gaming, DivX, CD burning and Internet-capable system. Like the Xbox 360 one would say. Entertainment OS, using the gaming platform as its main architecture. I would definitely buy it. I am running Windows XP Professional x64 Edition and it's great and all, but there are a lot of applications that I do not use at all. My PC is mainly for gaming and a multimedia centre. So at the end of the day it is quite a lot of money buying such an OS just to use for gaming.

Well, Vista is apparently very game-friendly, but to be honest, Microsoft just went one better and made a console with a dedicated OS for dedicated hardware. But think about it: most PC gamers don't just play games on their OS. That said, if it can play games, burn CDs, play movies and music, store your files, run Messenger and so on, isn't that what XP does anyway? What would be nice, though, is if Microsoft made it easier to remove complete chunks of the OS. For instance, if your PC is never going online or on a network, do you need all the networking bits?

FROM: Ashley Bruyns

SUBJECT: Dead Pixels

I just got my new 19" Acer Gaming series LCD, a Christmas gift, which I got to check just to make sure everything was in order, and to my surprise there was a bright white dead pixel. I contacted Acer and they took it in just to return it and tell me that there was nothing they could do because there is only one dead pixel and it's not in the centre. Thanks to Acer for ruining my Christmas and by the looks of it, my new year as well.



ALTHOUGH THE PRICE OF GAMES AND HARDWARE FOR THE XBOX IS RATHER HIGH, IT'S NOWHERE NEAR THE COST OF BUYING AND MAINTAINING A HIGH-END PC

Alas, this isn't uncommon. Usually you need somewhere between seven and ten pixels to get warranty cover (or something like that). At least dead pixels are less common than they used to be.

FROM: Ralph Viktor

SUBJECT: The PC is dead

I have been an avid PC gamer for many years now. I still remember when my dad bought our first PC (a 166MHz Pentium). Since that time we upgraded several times, but always far behind the newest and most powerful hardware. So this year I decided to buy myself a new PC, until I calculated the cost of a semi-decent PC. Way too expensive for me and still incapable of playing the latest games at anywhere near decent framerates and quality. Then I saw the Xbox 360 and decided that I wanted one, because for R3,699 you can get a powerful console, capable of playing all its games at decent quality and framerate. Although the price of games and hardware for the Xbox is rather high, it's nowhere near the cost of buying and maintaining a high-end PC. I know many gamers will agree and many will disagree, but for me the PC is dead as a gaming tool. Long live the Xbox!

We shouldn't be printing this letter, since it appears that NAG's readers are already convinced we've abandoned the PC as a gaming platform. Nevertheless, you have a point - one that many people have: the PC is a bit expensive for a gaming platform. The PC isn't dead, but the technology is so far ahead of the actual capacity of the games that hardware needs to slow down a little and become more affordable.

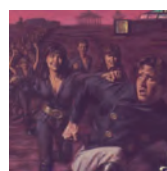
FROM: William

SUBJECT: Hardware monkey

Firstly, grand job with the mag guys. I always can't wait for it to be available. I just want to know why PC parts cost so much. I've been gaming for a long time, and I just don't know why it's so expensive.

*All hardware is actually derived from alien technology. Unfortunately, the aliens have noticed that we've been catching their ships and overclocking whatever we found on them. So they get better evasion technology, making it harder and thus more expensive to catch alien ships. Haven't you noticed that the letters U, F and O never appear in Intel, ATI, AMD, or ATI? Coincidence? **NAG***

RIP 'POINT-AND-CLICK' GENRE, I KNEW YOU WELL





SEGA RESURRECTS ALIENS

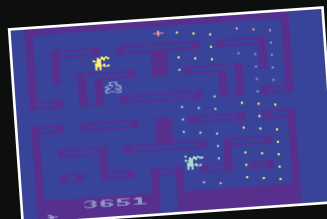
WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT it, the *Alien(s)* franchise has always been around. Since the first game appeared in 1982, these space monsters have returned several times, doing so so critically. They seem most comfortable when you throw a *Predator* into the mix. However, *Alien(s)* hasn't seen a game since 2000. This is about to change, since Sega announced that it will start releasing games based on the franchise. Multiple titles are apparently planned and the first will appear in 2009, with the word 'next-generation' being bandied around. Both PC and console games are apparently planned.

But since license games have a tendency of being quite poor, Sega took the extra measure of hiring some heavy-weight developers for the first two announced games, both which happen to be in heavy-weight genres. *KOTOR 2* and *Neverwinter Nights 2* developer Obsidian has been enlisted to work on a *Aliens* RPG, while *Brothers in Arms* developer Gearbox has signed up to create an *Aliens* FPS. Both studios clearly

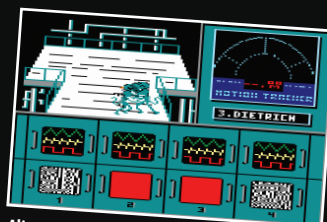
know how to work with someone else's baby, and there's little doubt there are many *Alien(s)* fans in both studios. Further indications that Sega is serious about "taking licensing to the next level" are apparent with the publisher already working on involving principle actors like Sigourney Weaver and Lance Henriksen. Mike Gallo, the senior producer of the *Alien(s)* games, says they will look at all of the source material and the games will not be based on a specific movie.

Other 20th Century Fox franchises have also been mentioned, such as cult action movie *Big Trouble in Little China*, the horror *The Fly* and *Fantastic Voyage*, but that all depends on the success of the *Alien(s)* games. Although studios that have had access to all kinds of material for a franchise still don't always get it right, Obsidian and Gearbox are definitely smart choices.

Brothers in Arms meets *Aliens*? The *Aliens* vs. *Predator* franchise, though, is not being involved in this deal.



Alien (1982) Atari 2600



Aliens: The Computer Game (1986) Apple II



Alien 3 (1992) Genesis



Aliens: A Comic Book Adventure (1995) DOS



Alien Trilogy (1996) DOS, PS1



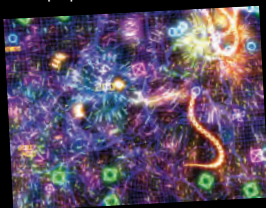
Alien Resurrection (2000) PS1

SNIPPETS

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

A US company has filed a lawsuit against **Nintendo**, saying its Wiimote is a violation of its patent for a "trigger operated electronic device." There are similarities, but analysts doubt the claim will stand in court.

K4rn4ge, the undisputed leader of **Geometry Wars** with a score of 360 million, plans to go one further and attempt the 1 billion mark. Mad or talented? Maybe both, but definitely not epileptic.



The former founders of **Viscious Cycle Games** and **Sinister Games**, respectively, have joined forces and started a new studio named Sentinel. No game has been announced yet.

Microsoft has fully launched **XNA Studio Express** and the **XNA Creators Club**. The former is a set of free tools for CP users to create Live Arcade games, while the latter is a subscription-based service where you can test your creations online. More info at www.msdn.com/XNA.



Valve will soon start Beta testing a new feature for its **Steam** service. Steam users will be able to send guest passes to their friends to try out a game. At the moment, the system will only support **Day of Defeat**, but that's bound to expand pending successful trials.



Gears of War has sold a whopping 2 million units, making it the fastest selling next-gen game of 2006 and the fastest Xbox-exclusive seller. It would appear Halo isn't going to hog the throne that easily.



THE TOP DOGS OF 2006

WITH 2006 BEHIND US, the hectic holiday period sanctified by game companies everywhere has also come and gone. This was a particularly important one, since all three next-generation consoles were on shelves and vying for the public's attention. However, the heavy hitter of the season, the PlayStation 3, ended up far below its weight. Initially plagued by severe shortages, the console's hefty price tag has also put a slur on sales. Nevertheless, the shortages deserve the most of the blame for a lacklustre season. According to US-based market analysts IDC, the PS3 only sold 750,000 units in the US during November and December. By contrast, the Xbox 360 took the top spot by selling an impressive two million units in the same period, giving it the most sales overall. With the PS3 still absent in PAL territories, the

360 also easily took the top spot there.

But the real winner was the console race's dark horse, Nintendo's Wii. Despite launching in mid November, the console chalked up an impressive 1.8 million sales in the US, a mere 200,000 behind the 360. The Wii moved over a million units in December in Japan as well, way ahead of either the 360 or PS3. To add to its glee, Nintendo also sold the most games over 2006 - 31 million units, the top of the list being *Pokémon Pearl and Diamond*. Nevertheless, Sony still had a star - the PS2 continued to sell strongly and Sony expects to ship 11 million more units during 2007.

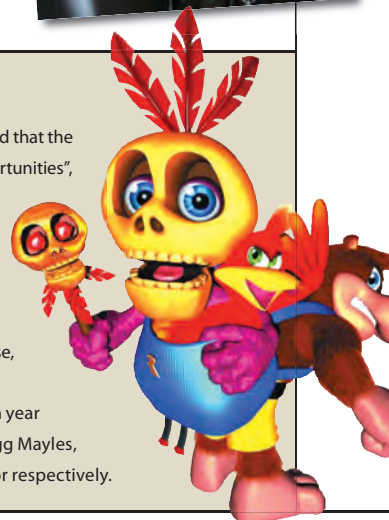


RARE LTD.'S FOUNDERS LEAVE

MICROSOFT RECENTLY ANNOUNCED the departure of Rare Ltd.'s co-founders, the brothers Chris and Tim Stamper. Established in 1982 as Ashby Computer Graphics, the company started off developing for the 8-bit ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 platforms before becoming a second-party developer for Nintendo. With a string of classic gaming accolades to their name, including such seminal Nintendo titles as the *Battletoads* and *Donkey Kong Country* series, *GoldenEye 007*, and *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, their 2002 acquisition by Microsoft was sung to the tune of a record-setting \$377 million.

In a press statement, it was announced that the Stammers had left to "pursue other opportunities", and while the notoriously media-shy brothers have declined to elaborate on these, Microsoft was quick to insist that their departure has nothing whatsoever to do with disappointing sales figures for Rare's most recent release, *Viva Piñata*.

Replacing the brothers are nineteen year Rare veteran Mark Betteridge and Gregg Mayles, as Studio Director and Creative Director respectively.





GERMANY CRACKS DOWN ON CRACKDOWN

THE GERMAN RATINGS BOARD, Unterhaltungssoftware Selbstkontrolle, has opted not to rate *Crackdown*, which places this title in an unenviable position. In Germany, games without a rating cannot be sold to minors, can only be sold in person (so no online or mail orders), and cannot be advertised or displayed in stores. Recently, *Gears of War* and *Dead Rising* were also not rated by this board, resulting in the previously mentioned restrictions and, consequently, lower sales. *Crackdown*'s future in Germany is further jeopardised by the fact that the

country holds the distinction of having the toughest laws on violence in videogames in Europe. To further complicate matters, and not just where this game is concerned, some German politicians are lobbying for further toughening of these laws. This move was ostensibly prompted by a recent shooting, last month, wherein an 18-year-old *Counter-Strike* player injured 11 people and then shot himself. If the law is passed, it will penalise vendors and even developers for some content, and would result in some games being banned.

INTROVERSION ANNOUNCES SUBVERSION

TO BE HONEST, THERE is almost nothing we could tell you about Introversion's upcoming game, *Subversion*. We do know a little, though, such as its release won't be for a good few years still. We know that it may involve some funky procedurally generated cities, complete with buildings. There may be a chair in it somewhere, but Introversion was adamant that the 'screenshots' they released recently are utterly not indicative of any final product, either in visual design or even in gameplay. Heck, we can't even tell you what type of game it will be, that's how secretive Introversion is.

Introversion's track record does set a decent precedent at least. Their first title, *Uplink*, remains a cunningly executed hacking simulator complete with firewalls and routers. Their second title *Darwinia* still

remains one of the most hauntingly beautiful action/RTS titles where you have to protect little computer people from viruses. *Defcon* exploded onto the scene as their third game, a global thermonuclear war simulator complete with multiplayer and modding support.

If those three titles are anything to go by, then this much is sure about *Subversion*: it will be cheap to purchase, will contain some stylish visuals, and most likely some form of multiplayer. As was with *Darwinia* and *Defcon*, the coding wizardry behind the game should ensure a tiny download, especially with all the talk of procedural generation forming the basis of much of the game (which is something *Spore* is also doing).

We'll keep our eyes on this one for you, and let you know the moment we know more.

WIN!

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SCI Entertainment has signed a deal with Warner Bros that will let it develop games for 11 licenses, including Looney-Tunes, Hanna-Barbera, and The O.C. The deal is worth £44.5 million and WB will get a 10% share in SCI.

Lost Planet seems set to be a hot title from the word go. The demo has been downloaded over a million times and players have collectively spent over 300,000 hours playing the multiplayer demo over Live.



If you have the means to run games from a flash card on your DS, a free version has been made for the handheld. The game also includes a level editor [www.mrdictionary.net/lemmings].

Pro sportsman Joel Zumaya, a pitcher for the US Baseball team Detroit Tigers, missed three games because of a persistent pain in his arm. Doctors soon found the cause – he had injured himself by playing too much **Guitar Hero**, a game he admits he loves.



THE SHIFTING MMO SANDS

THERE IS SO MUCH MMO news in the news lately, one might start to think it's a genre that makes a company obscene amounts of money. Through a slip of information by gaming retailers, later confirmed by Vivendi Games, it seems we can expect a *Battlestar Galactica Online*. The game will be exclusive to the Xbox 360 it seems, although the actual nature of the game has yet to be determined. It could just end up being an online strategy game, or racer. There is also no confirmation yet if the game will be based on the new series, or the old – but our money is on the new.

Nintendo hit the news when they partnered with Nexon, publisher of the widely popular 2D MMORPG *Maple Story*. Seems DS owners have lucked out, and will see *Maple Story* on the DS sooner rather than never. No talks yet about which regions will see the game's release. From the East, *CrimeCraft* has jumped from the shadows and is slated to use the Unreal

Engine 3. You'll be able to run shops, fight clan wars, and even become a bona fide criminal in a sprawling megapolis. However, this is developer Vogster's first game out the gate, and is only expected to see the light of Beta a few years down the line.

It seems to be a good year for sci-fi MMORPG announcements – even the prematurely cancelled show *Firefly* is expected to go massively online multiplayer. Fox Licensing signed an agreement with Metaverse, but nothing more is known. *Fallout* fans might be interested to hear that Interplay is toying with the idea of a *Fallout* MMORPG, "giving consumers an ongoing virtual experience of today's life as if the Cold War, which lasted for the best part of the second half of last century, had led to a nuclear disaster." Don't get your hopes up too high though; they estimate it'll take three and a half years before production sees anything playable.

MORAL AUTHORITIES THROW DOWN THE GAUNTLET IN NEW DOCUMENTARY

"W"HOEVER TELLS THE STORIES, defines the culture," declares a sage voice-over, before viewers are treated to a montage of animated videogame gore interspersed with lurid images of the September 11 attacks and the Columbine shooters, while superimposed speakers talk in grave tones about moral decay and violence as a perceived virtue. While director Spencer Halpin is quick to claim that the film is not anti-gaming, the implicit irony in this trailer for his new documentary *Moral Combat* apparently passed him by.

It's extraordinarily difficult not to see this as a yet another damning indictment of game culture. Although Halpin has dutifully included interviews with game journalists and developers, direful sophistries from scaremongers Jack Thompson and Joe Lieberman are likely to occlude these in the eyes of an ignorant and impressionable public that is all too ready to point fingers anywhere but themselves. The director all but admits this high-handed moral agenda, describing the film as a look at the debate "that pits artists' rights and our culture's thirst for violence and sensationalism, against our social obligation to protect the youth generation."

One wonders whether all this money and effort might have been better spent making a documentary about responsible parenting.



LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP (FOR A DASHBOARD THEME)

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS with buying a Dashboard Theme for your Xbox 360 on Live is that you cannot preview how a theme looks before buying it. This means you may spend your hard-earned pesos on something you think looks worse than what your little brother did in Photoshop that one time with the paint tool and the bucket.

Well, www.dashboardthemes.com to the rescue. These two guys go out and buy each new theme when they come out, take a photo and upload

it to the Website so you can try (and see if you like it) before you buy. The Website itself is super slick, with high-resolution photos of every theme. You can even 'thumbs up or down' a theme, rating it in the global scheme of things, so that you can send your favourite theme that one step higher up the Top Themes list.

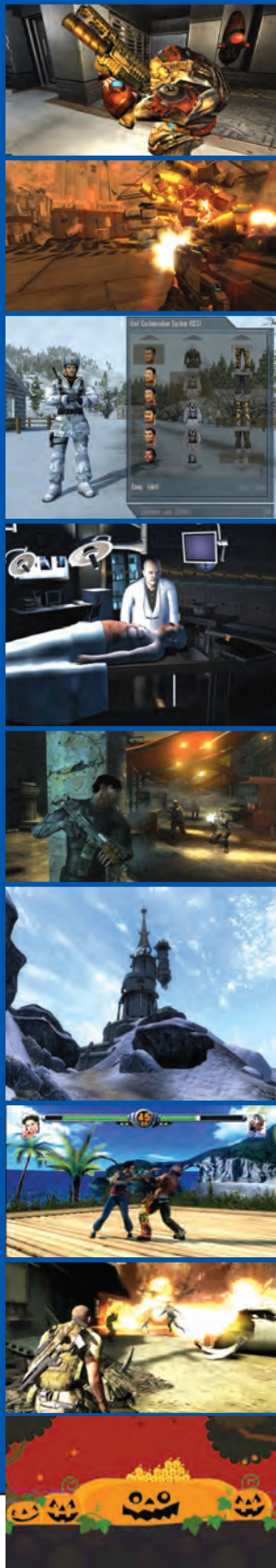
Our only complaint is that you can't see what each blade of the theme looks like, only the main Live Marketplace blade. Perhaps in future, they'll take the extra five or so photos.



BUDGET TOP 20

MOVERS & SHAKERS

A FEW FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER HEAVYWEIGHTS have made some announcements that will warm the hearts of PC action fans. Flagship Studio's **Diablo**-like **Hellgate: London** has been given a launch window. The studio announced that fans could expect it in "Q3 2007." There are also plans for an online subscription service, suggestive of the game's big multiplayer plans. *Prey* developer Human Head has announced, you guessed it, **Prey 2**. No details at all, except that the team say they realise they have to be very innovative. If you own an AGEIA PhysX card and you really want to push it, **Cellfactor: Revolution**, an FPS that will make heavy use of the card, has been dated for release in March. Another B-list FPS is getting a sequel. **Soldner 2** is due later this year, but strangely won't be developed by the original team. Instead, it will be developed by the team that made the patches for the game, and apparently the game will focus more on multiplayer. Not everything in the PC landscape is all action, though. **The Sims 2** is getting yet another expansion. Called **Seasons**, it will add all four seasons to your Sims' world. Meanwhile, *CSI* fans will be glad to hear that Telltale is working on **CSI: Hard Evidence**, based on the Las Vegas spin-off of the show. Sadly, the PC lost one significant title. **Dark Sector**, the next game by Unreal alumni Digital Extremes, will now only appear on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. Microsoft's platform is taking a short breather after the holiday period, so it had few announcements. Nevertheless, an interesting one is that Japanese fans of **Oblivion** are getting their wish – a translated version of the game will be released in Japan this year. Sega has also announced that **Virtua Fighter 5** will be released on the 360 later this year. Since it has finally been released, more PlayStation 3 news is arriving, but not all of it is good. A rumour that **Bioshock** would be released on the platform was shot down after the article that claimed it turned out to be from an old *Official PlayStation Magazine*. However, Ubisoft did confirm **Splinter Cell: Double Agent** for the March launch, complete with special moves using the SIXAXIS tilt movements. Moreover, Konami has come out to yet again discredit claims that **Metal Gear Solid 4** will appear on the 360, reiterating their support for the PS3 exclusivity. Staying with *MGS*, the assistant producer of **MGS: Portable Ops** said there would be a sequel if the game sold. Well, *Portable Ops* sold well, so you can figure it out. Another PSP classic, **LocoRoco**, might also return. Although it was a commercial flop, Sony's Phil Harrison said that they were "going to bring LocoRoco back in a couple of new ways with some new friends in the future." A new **Burnout** game has also been announced for the PSP. Finally, director Kevin Smith would like to see a **Jay and Silent Bob** game, but he doesn't want to do it: "I'm really not good enough to pull it off. Games is one field that I like to be entertained, rather than try to be entertaining."



1. Playboy The Mansion Gold Edition



2. CSI: Miami



3. The Settlers: Heritage of Kings



4. Splinter Cell Chaos Theory



5. Silent Hunter III



6. Heroes of Might and Magic III & IV Complete



7. Microsoft Train Simulator



8. Combat Flight Simulator 2



9. Far Cry



10. CSI: Dark Motives



11. Prince of Persia Warrior Within



12. Lock On Air Combat Simulator



13. Age of Mythology Gold Edition



14. Rise of Nations Gold Edition



15. Age of Empires Gold Edition



16. Chessmaster 10th Edition



17. Age of Empires Collector's Edition



18. Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002



19. Dungeon Siege Legends of Aranna



20. Scrabble 2005 Edition

R99 each



Sony had to fess up about a guerrilla marketing campaign after online users quickly spotted it. The campaign was disguised as a series of videos on YouTube of a group of people doing things to convince someone they need a PSP for Christmas. However, users spotted it as fake and the company soon posted an apology.

Is Microsoft charging you for stuff you already own? That might be the case. A poster on online forum NeoGAF spotted that when he purchased something from Live, it often only sent small files. That's likely a decryption code, which means the piece of armour or cheat you just paid for might have been on the game disc all along.



Indie developer 4DRulers has begun several campaigns to raise funds for its next game. This includes buying stakes in the game, access to builds and even technology licensing. More at www.4drulers.com.

What happened to the big names from the now-defunct Clover Studios, responsible for Okami and Godhand? Shinji Mikami apparently kept contractual ties with Capcom, but Atsushi Inaba is rumoured to have started a new development studio. Will we ever see anything he produces here in the West?



Bungie veteran Max Hoberman, a former team leader at the studio, has opened his own studio. Certain Affinity won't just make Xbox games, he says, but the studio's first job for now is making maps for Halo 2 multiplayer. A 360 title is planned for later.



AGASA BF2142 TEAM TAKES PART IN INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENT

A RECENT BATTLEFIELD 2142 TOURNAMENT held in Taipei was a huge success - nine countries took part in it. The countries were split into three groups and our very own Advanced Special Forces (ASF) was pitted against the likes of South Korea and New Zealand during the group stage. In the first round that ASF played, it was against South Korea, one of the best teams in the world in almost all e-sporting genres. It was a tough match for ASF with South Korea, a far more experienced

group, completely devastating the South African team in both matches played. But in the second round, where ASF was pitted against the New Zealand team, all was not lost with a match going to each team. It was a nail biting two matches against New Zealand where ASF could have done a lot better had it not been for the shellshock from their matches against South Korea. In the end, however, South Africa's first national e-sports

team came in at 8th place, a bit disappointing for some, but a great achievement to actually compete in a professional tournament of this magnitude. Hopefully, with enough practice during the first official season organised by the AGASA starting soon, South Africa's hopes and dreams of bringing home a title will become a reality in 2007.



VAPORWARE AWARDS 2006

THE BALLOTS ARE IN, and Wired has published its ninth annual top ten names of shame: items that have been promised, hyped up, and scheduled for release, but never actually materialised. Despite receiving a considerable number of votes, previous runner-up StarCraft: Ghost was disqualified as Blizzard has finally cancelled it, while the PlayStation 3 only just managed to avoid dishonour with its eleventh hour Christmas release.

At number nine is the FPS *Stalker: Shadow of Chernobyl*, announced in 2001 and yet to see the fluorescent light of a retail shelf. A fan site linked from the developer's main page includes a diatribe penned by its bitter host, and a photograph of somebody's granny flipping the bird to anybody who might have cared. Snagging seventh place is E3 2004 darling, *Gran Turismo* for PSP, the little launch title that couldn't. Will Wright's evolution game *Spore* seems to have gotten itself mired somewhere in the Cretaceous Period, earning itself fourth place, while previous two-time champion and Lifetime Achievement Award winner *Duke Nukem Forever* once again (dis)graces the podium of ignominy. Undaunted, developer 3D Realms insists the project is still on, with a notice posted on its Website saying the game will be released "when it's done."





SPIKE TV VIDEO GAME AWARDS 2006

THE SPIKE TV VIDEO Game Awards (VGA) is an annual award show that acknowledges the best computer and videogames of the year, and has been held since 2003. Some of the winners for last year are listed below:

- **GAME OF THE YEAR** (also Best RPG, Best Original Score and Most Addictive Game) - The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion (Bethesda Softworks)
- **ACTION GAME OF THE YEAR** - Dead Rising (Capcom)
- **BEST INDIVIDUAL SPORTS GAME** - Tony Hawk's Project 8 (Activision/Neversoft)
- **CYBER VIXEN OF THE YEAR** - Alyx Vance - Half-Life 2: Episode One (Valve)
- **BEST GAME BASED ON A MOVIE OR TV SHOW** - Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy (LucasArts/Traveller's Tales)
- **BEST PERFORMANCE BY A HUMAN (MALE)** - Patrick Stewart in The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion (Bethesda Softworks)
- **BEST PERFORMANCE BY A HUMAN (FEMALE)** - Vida Guerra in Scarface: The World Is Yours (Vivendi/Radical Entertainment)
- **BEST CAST** - Family Guy Video Game! (2K Games/High Voltage Software)
- **BEST SOUNDTRACK** - Guitar Hero II (Red Octane/Harmonix)
- **STUDIO OF THE YEAR** - Cliff Bleszinski / Epic Games (Gears of War)
- **BEST FIGHTING GAME** - Mortal Kombat: Armageddon (Midway Games)
- **BEST SHOOTER** (also Best Graphics and Best Multiplayer Game) - Gears of War (Microsoft/Epic Games)
- **BEST HANDHELD GAME** - New Super Mario Bros. (Nintendo/Nintendo EAD)
- **BEST BREAKTHROUGH TECHNOLOGY** - Wii (Nintendo)
- **BEST PC GAME** (also Best Military Game) - Company of Heroes (THQ/Relic)



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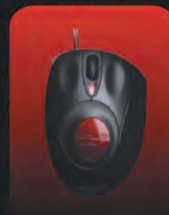
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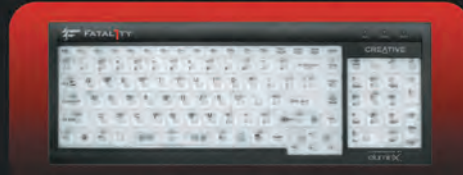
FATAL1TY
1010 Mouse



FATAL1TY
Pro Laser Mouse*



FATAL1TY
Gaming Keyboard*



Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel
WWW.FATAL1TY.COM

* Landing in South Africa January 2007

www.asia.creative.com



Terra Soft's **Yellow Dog Linux** for the PlayStation 3 has been made available. For more, go to www.terrasoftsolutions.com.

Actress **Kirsten Bell**, who is currently doing voice work for upcoming wall-hopper **Assassin's Creed**, has done what Ubisoft tried to avoid and given away some key elements of the plot. Don't worry, we won't tell you what it is, but it's not all about Crusades and such. We doubt Miss Bell will be getting job offers from Ubisoft again soon.



The free 3D deathmatch FPS **Nexuiz** has been updated. Grab the latest version at www.alientrap.org/nexuiz.



Is the 360 already ready for homebrew? At the **23C3 Hacker Conference** recently held in Germany, a person demonstrated a modified 360 that can apparently run Linux. How far are we from the hacks that made the Xbox so cool?

Some kind folk have taken their own time and remade the classic brawler **Streets of Rage**. The remake, which might be stopped because it doesn't have permission to use the IP, can be found at www.bombergames.net/sorr_e.htm.

Think **Gears of War**'s 2 million units sold are impressive? Fast food franchise **Burger King** also released a few 'distraction' games and quickly moved over 2 million units collectively. It looks like people do like being distracted on their 360s.



LEGO STAR WARS DEVELOPER BUILDS A NEW EMPIRE

AFTER NABING A BAFTA award for 'Best Gameplay' for last year's enormously successful *Lego Star Wars 2: The Original Trilogy*, UK-based developer Traveller's Tales has marched on and acquired fellow UK studio Embryonic for an undisclosed sum. Formed in 1989, now commanding a force of over one hundred employees, and best known for its acclaimed *Lego Star Wars* games, TT has also worked on a number of titles for Sega, Nintendo, Henson Interactive and Sony-Psychosis, including *Crash Bandicoot*, *Sonic 3D*, and *Bionicle*

Heroes. Embryonic Studio, opened in 2005, is responsible for the *Privateer* games, as well as a number of licensed titles including *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, *Star Trek: Invasion*, and *Battlestar Galactica*.

Since merging with publisher Giant Interactive in 2005, TT has been determined to establish itself as a leading producer of family entertainment, and according to chief Job Burton, its strategic acquisition of Embryonic's "very talented workforce will help drive Traveller's Tales on to further success."

SILENT HILL 5 COMING...

THE ICONIC SURVIVAL HORROR series *Silent Hill* has had its difficulties, but even the worst in the series (the subject of many fan debates) were solid experiences of fear and intriguing mystery. However, the series is due for a gearshift and that seems to be exactly the thinking behind the

fifth game in the series. Japanese weekly *Famitsu* spoke to the game's producer and musician, Akira Yamaoka, about what fans can expect. Though he was sparse with details, Akira did point back to *Silent Hill 2*, arguably the best of the series.

"I cannot say much about the development of the game," he said, "but I can say we are working on a new unique idea of fear in daylight and the game will play like *Silent Hill 2*'s psychological roots." The daylight idea is also a radical departure from the game, traditionally shrouded in fog and darkness. Even the movie exploited this dynamic. This is the new avenue for survival horror, as Yamaoka admits by explaining this aspect is "like the *Resident Evil 5* trailer where it was not the middle of the night and the vision was clear but the fear was still there." We'll have to wait for any release or platform details.



SUPER COLUMBINE MASSACRE TOO EDGY FOR SLAMDANCE FESTIVAL

"ON THE ONE HAND a jury selected this game [*Super Columbine Massacre RPG*], and as a result of that decision it leads to our organisation supporting their creative decision," said Slamdance President Peter Baxter. "On the other hand there are moral obligations to consider here with this particular game in addition to the impact it could have on the Slamdance organisation and its community."

"Ultimately it was my decision to pull this game and I hope that a choice like it will never have to be made again." - Slamdance festival president Peter Baxter.

The short of it is this: Slamdance is a film festival that has also included a category for games, honouring titles that truly show the best of what gaming has to offer in terms of it being an interactive artistic medium. *Super Columbine Massacre RPG* is an ethically and morally engaging free game, created to discuss the various themes and issues that surround the 1999 Columbine High School massacre in which two teenage students carried out a shooting rampage, killing 12 students and a teacher. The game was pulled because the festival president had moral issues with the game, which is out of place considering the subject matter of many films shown at Slamdance. To show solidarity, several nominated games have been pulled by their developers in protest, and a sponsor has also pulled out.





HALO MOBILE DEVELOPER SUES MICROSOFT

FRENCH MOBILE DEVELOPER IN-FUSIO is taking Microsoft to court over difficulties with a proposed *Halo* mobile game. The project was started in 2005, but since then, claims In-Fusio, Microsoft has refused to either approve completed designs or present desired changes. The French mobile developer then withheld the second \$500,000 payment of four, to which Microsoft responded by intending to terminate the \$2 million agreement. To date, In-Fusio has set up a portal site delivering *Halo* content such as wallpapers and ringtones to mobile phones.

"Under the Agreement, In-Fusio's Halo



programming designs are subject to Microsoft's approval, which cannot be unreasonably withheld," says In-Fusio's lawsuit filing. "Nevertheless, Microsoft has thwarted In-Fusio's efforts to develop *Halo* under the Agreement. Indeed, in the last 11 months Microsoft has approved no fully-developed In-Fusio *Halo* game designs; ignoring and then refusing to accept In-Fusio's game design concepts with little or no explanation and leaving In-Fusio little basis to revise its concepts to obtain Microsoft's approval."



FRAGDOLLS CLINCHES FEMALE GAMING FIRST

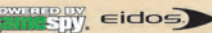
IF YOU ARE STILL towing the line that girl gamers should get another hobby and that pro girl gamers are just a complete joke, you might need to start dusting off your skills. The Fragdolls, an all-female clan that endures as much snide criticism as flirting from male gamers, has made history by not only winning their first tournament on a pro event, but also being the first all-female team to do so. The team beat previously undefeated The Unknown at the CPL Winter finals for *Rainbow Six: Vegas* during the event, held in mid December.

"We have been getting more experience

with competition and playing under pressure by playing in pro-circuit tournaments like MLG and WSVG over the past year," said team captain Morgan "Rhoulette" Romine. "Being able to come here to play *Rainbow*, always our favourite multiplayer series, and bring our experience with both online and live event competitions made for an ideal combination. We played as a team, communicated well, stuck to our strategies, and won."

So snicker at other gamers all you like - just remember that these days the 'guy' owning you online could very well be a little kid or a girl.

COME FLY
with me!



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SPONSOR REQUIRED: ONLY COMPANIES WILLING TO GIVE AWAY COOL STUFF NEED APPLY

BYTES



LOST & FOUND

Every month in honour of our favourite TV show *Lost*, we'll hide the Dharma Initiative logo somewhere in the magazine. It could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find it and send an e-mail to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [Dharma February]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win... absolutely nothing! This month is special: while you're searching high and low for the Dharma symbol we're also searching... for a new sponsor for this competition. If you're keen, send mail here: ed@nag.co.za.

LAST MONTH'S WINNER



Kevin Hawes, p57

Ascaron has launched the official site for *Sacred 2* at www.sacred2.com. Head there to keep up to date on what the next game in this cult RPG has to offer.



MORE GAME MOVIES AHEAD

THE GAMING INDUSTRY IS full of irony. Only in gaming could someone like Jack Thompson actually become a well-known figure. The same can be said for the notorious Uwe Boll, who keeps making movies based on games. After spending the past year finishing the *Postal* and *Dungeon Siege* movies, punching critics and threatening to get the *Metal Gear Solid* rights, Boll is going to start working on *Far Cry*. However, he might be in a spot: according to the director, Ubisoft wants this movie to be good.

"With *Far Cry*, Ubisoft wants me to make a good movie because this is already a big franchise for them and they want to keep it going," said Boll. That makes sense, since Ubisoft bought *Far Cry* from the departing Crytek and obviously wants to safeguard its investment. The question is, of course, whether Ubisoft actually saw any of Boll's game movies. While the man states that his critics never watched his films, we have and

they are extremely bad. So bad, in fact, that they border on really good (*Bloodrayne* is like a how-to of bad cinematography).

Nevertheless, Boll isn't the only one eyeing more game movies. Capcom wants more game movies as well after the success of *Resident Evil*. With a new *Street Fighter* movie in production, the company's VP of licensing recently told the Hollywood Reporter that *Onimusha* and *Devil May Cry* are possible candidates. Meanwhile, *Silent Hill* director Christopher Gans has mentioned a sequel, co-written by Neil Gaiman. Gaiman said it isn't so, but he is waiting for the call...



THE EVOLUTION OF BEAT'EM UPS



FREE GAME OF THE MONTH

STEPMANIA

URL: www.stepmania.com
GENRE: Dancing/Rhythm

STEPMANIA IS A FREE clone of popular dancing/rhythm game, *Dance Dance Revolution*. Thanks to the efforts of fans and the community surrounding *StepMania*, you can now get the entire experience free, by downloading custom-made songs and step files. You can download *StepMania* as well as the StepMix contest winners from the Website [www.stepmania.com/wiki/Download_StepMix_Songs].

The StepMix files are .smzip, which will automatically install when you double-click on them (after you have installed *StepMania*). The premise of games such as *DDR* and *StepMania* is simple: you have to hit the arrows (either on the keyboard, or on the external USB dance mat, which you can buy at most stores

these days)

in time to the arrows onscreen as they reach the top row of white arrows. Naturally, playing on a

keyboard is very easy and defeats the object (c'mon, being silly on a dance mat is fun), but it's still good fun and a decent enough way to while away the time with some music. Additionally, you can download Announcer files and Character Files from *StepManiaThings* [www.stepmaniatings.com] to spice things up a little, or if you're inclined, you can make your own step files to whatever music you choose.



CAPTION OF THE MONTH

EVERY MONTH WE'LL CHOOSE a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better [funny] caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject [February Caption].



FEBRUARY CONTEST

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:

"Looks like someone missed the Severe Hoof Damage sign."



JANUARY WINNER

"What did you do with Nemo?!?!"...

Neeeeeemmmooooo!"

—Garth Pape

RULES: (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. (3) Obey all posted speed limits. (4) Never run with scissors. (5) There is no spoon. (6) Don't tell me what I can't do!

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NEW SOUTH KOREAN GAMING LAWS ABOUND

IN A SURPRISING MOVE, South Korea has pulled much of its censorship banning games depicting military action against their neighbours North Korea. Previously, under the ban any game that was negative towards North Korea was not allowed to be sold in the South. The logic went that it would only stir up more problems in the already tense situation between North and South. Now with the ban lifted, games such as *Ghost Recon 2* and *Mercenaries* can be sold in South Korea.

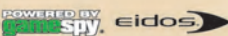


On the flip side, a new controversial bill has been proposed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in South Korea, which aims to control the exchange of phat virtual lewt. Described by the deputy director of the Ministry's Game Industry Division as an attempt to "tighten regulations on hazardous gambling activities," the law, if passed, would prohibit the sale and purchase of virtual currency. It would not affect item trading, though. What this bill really means is a strong curbing of gold farming, where gamers pay real world money for in-game currency, which has been gathered in 'Korean Gold-Farming Sweatshops'. The bill has received strong support from some in the South Korean game industry, especially Internet cafés.

WELL...
Hello Sailor!



FEBRUARY 2007



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A European executive from Microsoft has added more to the speculation surrounding games for the Zune saying, "gaming is certainly something we're considering for the device." Are iPod games around the corner as well?



Bully might not get a sequel, according to chat-happy analyst Michael Pachter. The game's sales slid slowly, leaving it in the low hundred thousand. However, there might still be hope of more from the series – Rockstar recently announced a PSP version of another slow seller, **The Warriors**.

Someone spotted a new ESRB rating on the board's Website for **Final Doom**. This version was based on Doom 2, but featured more maps. So is Doom 2 due to appear on Live Arcade?



For some reason **Lego** has returned as a popular toy to depict game characters and scenes. **Halo** has quite a following of Lego builders emulating the game series. Check out their work at halo.saber-scorpion.com.



Doug Lowenstein, defender of games and co-founder of the ESA, has quit his position at the company to pursue other interests. However, he says he hasn't lost interest in the industry or that this threatens the new E3. He's just moving on.



GOD OF WAR 2 GOES BETA

CORY BARLOG, GOD OF War 2's game director, announced on his blog that the game went into official Beta at the end of December. That means that the Feb/March release of this highly anticipated PS2 game is really likely to happen and the promised demo should surface any day now. There were fears that the game's delays were to add more levels, but Barlog dispelled the rumour, saying that it was used to tighten things up and make sure the game is polished.

"As for the idea that we pushed back so why don't we add some levels... we pushed back to make sure everything we have now is as tight and clean and fun as it can be. We are using that extra time to make the game solid not to add more stuff to it and release a buggy game." As for a special edition, he writes that that won't happen any time soon. He also doesn't mention a possible sequel, but we can only hope that Kratos will emerge once again on the PlayStation 3.

GEARS OF WAR FOR PC... AGAIN

SO IS **GEARS OF War** coming to the PC or not? Considering the long delays between **Halo**'s PC and Xbox versions (two years), even if it is announced, we're not sure if we're willing to wait THAT long. **Halo 2**'s PC version is already taking longer than two years, but maybe Bungee wants to make sure it was better than the first port. Meanwhile, rumours continue to claim that a PC version of Epic's very successful shooter is on its way. The first was a fake box in a picture from a popular PC magazine, but the suggestion was shot down by both Epic and Microsoft. Nevertheless, a slightly more showing clue has arisen in some NVIDIA ForceWare drivers, where people tinkering with the files found references to a **Gears of War** PC version. Maybe Epic is busy getting it to work on DirectX 10. Maybe you should start saving for that GeForce 8...



MOD OF THE MONTH

GOLDENEYE: SOURCE

GAME: **Half-Life 2**

URL: www.goldeneyesource.com

GOLDENEYE: SOURCE IS A **Half-Life 2** modification that aims to "bring back the memories and experiences from the original **GoldenEye 64** (**GoldenEye 007**)," using the Source engine. **GoldenEye 007**, developed by Rare, appeared on the Nintendo 64 back in 1997 and quickly became well known for its multiplayer deathmatch mode. The GES team is focusing on recreating the multiplayer aspect exclusively, as well as incorporating modern-day conventions into the experience. The team consists of over 20 dedicated members, and the first Beta release proves its commitment to the project.

The current Beta can be found via Steam or via a list of mirrors [http://dev.goldeneyesource.com/wiki/index.php/Beta1_Mirrors], and as is expected from Beta software, is rather buggy. We found it helps to turn HDR off, and to switch shadow detail to low. The deathmatch experience in **GoldenEye** is both familiar and new, the weapons have been masterfully crafted, and overall it's a lot of fun. We're looking forward to the future releases of this mod, so keep an eye on it.



Look & Listen

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CHARTS

PC GAMES

#	Title
1	Sims 2: Pets
2	Need For Speed: Carbon
3	Sims 2: Holiday Edition
4	Sims 2: Happy Holiday Stuff
5	Flight Sim X Deluxe
6	Cricket 07
7	Lord of the Rings: Rise of the Witch King
8	Neverwinter Nights 2
9	Tiger Woods 07
10	Warhammer: Mark of Chaos

PLAYSTATION 2

#	Title
1	Need for Speed: Carbon
2	Gran Turismo 4 Platinum
3	Cricket 07
4	FIFA 07
5	Tekken 5 Platinum
6	WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 07
7	Sims 2: Pets
8	Singstar Legends
9	WRC Rally Evolved Platinum
10	Tiger Woods 07

PSP

#	Title
1	Need for Speed: Carbon
2	Sims 2: Pets
3	FIFA 07
4	Tekken Dark Resurrection
5	Medal of Honor
6	Tiger Woods 07
7	Grand Theft Auto Vice City
8	WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 07
9	Ace Combat: Skies of Deception
10	Prince of Persia: Revelation

XBOX 360

#	Title
1	Gears of War
2	Need for Speed: Carbon
3	Rainbow 6 Vegas
4	WWE Smackdown vs. Raw
5	Call of Duty 3
6	Project Gotham Racing 3
7	Tony Hawk's Project 8
8	FIFA 07
9	F.E.A.R.
10	Dead Rising

APPLE GETS ITS IGAME ON

THE RUMOUR MILL RECENTLY spat out an intriguing little nugget. According to an anonymous GameSpot source, Apple is allegedly hiring programmers with a "gaming background" for a super secret project. With the introduction of Intel processors, and the release of BootCamp, allowing Mac systems to run Windows, as well as performance-driven development and improvement for OS X, are Steve Jobs and co finally thinking different about gaming? A storm of speculation has predictably ensued, while Apple itself has maintained an inscrutable silence on the topic.

As this recruitment is supposedly taking place under the iTunes division, it's possible that Apple intends to develop games for the iPod, to be sold through its enormously popular online store. If rumours of an upcoming touch screen iPod are true, this is an attractive theory. Nonetheless, if Apple really is making a sudden and concerted effort to enlist gaming coders, it's possible that the Mac itself is the target platform. Given that the iMac and MacBook Pro are reasonably respectable gaming machines, suggestions of Mac-exclusive games development aren't wholly unlikely; not so the hypotheses of the somewhat improbable advent of an Apple console.

Naysayers have been quick to trample all of this, however, claiming wishful and myopic thinking. The iPod, for example, would require a dramatic redesign in order to compete with established mobile gaming platforms like the PSP. Serious PC gaming, moreover, despite being a huge potential market, requires constant, rapid hardware and software development – an investment that Apple simply can't afford.

We'll just have to wait and see.



While *Left Behind* struggles with a lot of unnecessary controversy, another Christian-themed game has been announced – *Tribulation Knights*, a non-violent freeform game that includes features like "the largest environments seen in the Christian gaming world." We guess they don't mean *San Andreas*.

www.tribulationknights.com

Come on in...
THE WATER'S FINE!



**BATTLESTATIONS
★ MIDWAY ★**
FEBRUARY 2007



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THIS WAR IS YOUR WAR

14,000FT ABOVE - 400FT BELOW... AND ALL THE ACTION IN BETWEEN



BATTLESTATIONS
★ **MIDWAY** ★

FEBRUARY 2007



Website **PSPFanboy** reports that **Guitar Hero** developer Harmonic pitched a PSP version of its classic rhythm game *Frequency* to Sony, but the offer was turned down. Hopefully they won't stop trying to make another sequel.

Developer **Kuju** has announced a split from publisher LucasArts. The move comes after LucasArts recently cancelled the PSP title *Traxion*, which Kuju was developing.

Do you know Jack? If you recall this great quiz game, you'll remember that **You Don't Know Jack** was excellent, but a new version hasn't appeared for years, until now. www.youdontknowjack.com is the online version of the game, updated regularly. Just don't laugh too loudly while playing it at work.



A special **Kane** edition of **Command & Conquer 3** will be released at the same time as the normal game. The special edition contains a DVD with behind-the-scenes footage, a blooper reel, strategy videos from the developers, and extra maps and unit skins.

Phillips has launched AmBX, a peripheral series that adds fans, more sound, and flashing lights to your gaming experience. It sounds very gimmicky, but according to the Guardian Games Blog (blogs.guardian.co.uk/games/archives), it's actually very effective. However, it costs between \$200 and \$400.



SONY MADE A LARGE faux pas recently, by jumping the gun and making some rather silly assumptions. According to Sony, their SIXAXIS PlayStation 3 controller was awarded an Emmy by the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. This information quickly spread on the Internet, but the truth quickly set things straight. The Emmy Award for 'Peripheral Development and Technological Impact of Video Game Controllers' was actually for their Dual-Shock PlayStation 2 controller. The award was actually also handed to Nintendo for their D-pad (of NES controller origins).

- There seems to be no love for the PlayStation 3, not even by those who bought the console to sell on eBay. Opportunists trying to sell the PS3 on eBay found demand lacking, and have started returning the consoles to stores for a refund. This has led, in part, to stores having a surplus of PS3s. Some stores even make cute signs to announce that yes, "We have them! Come buy!" Even in Japan there are confirmed reports of unsold PS3s lining store shelves.

- In response to unconfirmed reports of the PlayStation 3 launch for Europe being delayed from March till September, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe boss David Reeves was quick to chime "We're still on schedule to launch PS3 in March throughout the PAL territories. All speculation otherwise is without foundation." Some good news at least.

- A company named Research and Markets has just released a report titled 'The Transforming Global Video Games Market: The Emergence of Next Generation Gaming', which predicts: "The Sony PlayStation 3 is expected to win the console war in the long term with an install base of around 75 million globally by 2010. The console is not

expected to dominate as much as its predecessor, the PS2, due to late launch issues in the PAL region and the early lead of Microsoft's Xbox 360."

- In stark contrast, the Nintendo Wii seems to be going from strength to strength, despite people injuring themselves and damaging their expensive televisions

by getting a little too into the game. Looking into the 'breaking Wiimote strap' problem, newer shipments of the Wii have a much stronger, reinforced strap. Responding to the reports of injuries, Nintendo head Satoru Iwata jokes a little, "Of course before the launch of the Wii hardware Nintendo had a number of tests on the durability of everything, including the strap, but our understanding right now is that even beyond our expectations people are becoming more and more excited playing with

the Wii." On the other side of the coin, Nintendo are fighting one class-action lawsuit and one regular lawsuit related to the Wii. One, of course, is a lawsuit by someone who injured himself or herself while playing, and the other is by Interlink Electronics, who claim Nintendo ripped off their patent.

- The Xbox is having a much more leisurely time. US Soldiers in Iraq are playing the Halo 3 Beta and it seems movie-bombs still sell remarkably well on the new Live downloadable HD movie service, even outperforming competitor Amazon in terms of downloadable movie sales. Microsoft announced that they have officially sold 10.4 million units, making good on their promise of 10 million by the end of 2006.



FEBRUARY CALENDAR

Release date information supplied by kalahari.net



1

RELEASE: Steel Horizon (PSP)
Date TBA

RELEASE: Bomberman (PSP)
Date TBA

RELEASE: Unreal Tournament
2007 (PC) Date TBA ▼

RELEASE: Desperate
Housewives (PC) Date TBA

2

LAN: Carnage.Lan - Cape Town
(www.langames.co.za)

3/4

NAG FUN FACT:
When you become
Editor of NAG,
you are given four
virgins in a large
bucket filled with
geese.

COMPETITION:

Win a World of Warcraft hamper containing World of Warcraft, World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade and a World of Warcraft T-Shirt. To enter, simply send an e-mail to gaming@kalahari.net with the answer to the following question: **Name one new feature in World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade.**



9

RELEASE: Arthur and the
Invisibles (PC)

RELEASE: IL2 1946 (PC)

RELEASE: Whirlwind Vietnam
(PC)

10/11

LAN: PULSE - Brits
(www.langames.co.za)

15

RELEASE: Capcom Puzzle
Word (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Ygo GX Tag Battle
(PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Death Jr. 2 (PSP)
Date TBA

16

RELEASE: Test Drive Unlimited
(PC) Pre-order for only R257.36

RELEASE: UFO: Afterlight (PC)
Pre-order for only R257.36

RELEASE: Xpand Rally
Xtreme (PC)

RELEASE: City Life Deluxe (PC)
LAN: Organised Chaos - Cape
Town (www.langames.co.za)

17/18

LAN: Mayhem - Boskburg
(www.langames.co.za)

19

RELEASE: Capcom Classics 2
(PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Dancing Stage
Supernova (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Demon Chaos (PS2)
Date TBA

RELEASE: Zombie Virus (PS2)
Date TBA

20

RELEASE: Xiaolin Showdown
(PS2, PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Samurai Warriors 2:
Empires (PS2) Date TBA ▼

RELEASE: Global Defence
Force (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Dragon Sister (PS2)
Date TBA

21

RELEASE: Ghost Rider ▲
(PS2, PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Rule of Rose (PS2)
Date TBA

RELEASE: Armored Core Last
Raven (PS2) Date TBA

RELEASE: Wild Arms 4 (PS2)
Date TBA

22

RELEASE: Beats (PSP)
Date TBA

RELEASE: Shinobido - Tales of
the Ninja (PSP) Date TBA

RELEASE: Dungeon Siege:
Throne of Agony (PSP) Date TBA



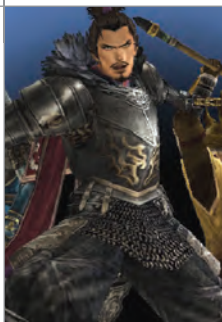
24/25

RELEASE: Vanguard: Saga of
Heroes (PC) ◀

LAN: PULSE - Brits
(www.langames.co.za)

26

RELEASE: The Sims 2:
Seasons (PC)



28

RELEASE: Fast and Furious:
Tokyo Drift (PS2) ▶



RELEASE: Malestrom (PC)
Date TBA

RELEASE: Fuzion Frenzy 2
(360) Date TBA

RELEASE: Crackdown (360)
Date TBA

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MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS

2007 PREDICTIONS

By Miktar Dracon

HEAR YE, HEAR YE! Come one come all, step right up! The amazing Miktar will now make his predictions for the year two-thousand-and-six-plus-one! Greatly admire his incredible foresight, diligent delivery, and overwhelming verbosity! Only one sixpence and you too can experience the rapture that he will now bestow!

Welcome friends, family, countrymen, countrywomen, and country babies. Welcome to my predictions for gaming in 2007. The big two-oh-oh-zeben is a magical year, yes indeed. The Wii has launched, the PlayStation 3 has been ejected, and the Xbox 360 continues to take long strides towards victory. Somewhere in the background, the PC gets the occasional game of note. Now, using my mystical gamer power of prediction, heed my prognostication!

Prediction: The PlayStation 3 launch for Europe, and thus South Africa, will be delayed until September. Yes, rumours are flying about a supposed pushback and Sony isn't saying anything, but it sounds right to me. The only hitch here is that with the recent drop in sales for the PS3 in the US, leaving 30 or more units sitting on store shelves with notes of 'Please Buy Me' attached to them, perhaps Sony will make the March release since they technically now have a surplus of units. However, I wouldn't bank on it.

Prediction: *World of Warcraft* will start to wane, subscriber numbers will slowly fall, and eventually *World of Warcraft* will compete shoulder-to-shoulder with the likes of *Lord of the Rings Online* and other MMORPG offerings later in the year. "The brightest candle burns quickest" is what my momma used to say, and *WoW* seems intent on burning through

WELCOME
TO MY
PREDICTIONS
FOR GAMING
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YES INDEED

its wick as fast as possible. Oh sure, the expansion(s) will boost numbers for a while, but look at *Everquest* and its 8-plus expansions - it helps, but not really.

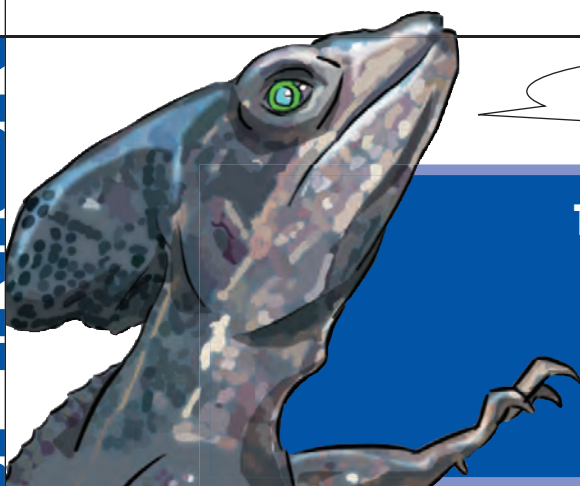
Prediction: DVD winning the format wars. This is a bit of a no-brainer and I may be taking a leap of faith, but the uptake of Blu-ray and HD DVD hasn't been positive. The industry doesn't seem interested in moving over to yet another new standard when the last one has only just become commonplace enough. Finally, most rental stores have dumped their VHS tapes in favour of DVDs - these companies pushing for a new standard are just trying to turn a quick buck, relying on the idea that if DVD did so well, a newer, better, faster, stronger DVD (in HD) will do even better. They are fooling themselves, and the consumer buying power might just prove it over the course of the year.

Prediction: At least three more additions will be made to the *Final Fantasy* franchise this year alone. Okay, I'm cheating here since indubitably Square-Enix will cash in on its long-running series. A proper, gutsy prediction might have been that there will be no more *Final Fantasy* games, but let's face it, that'll never happen.

Prediction: Here in South Africa, we will see less and less Nintendo products until eventually none are sold here aside from imports. Part of this prediction is that there will be no Wii launch locally. I base this prediction mostly on hearsay, but considering the dubious past of retail Nintendo products here on the butt-end of the gaming universe, I don't think I'm far off.

And there you have it, ladies and gentleman - my incredible predictions for gaming in 2007. Be amazed! **NAG**





See ya, suckers!

THE DOMAIN OF THE BASILISK

THIS IS SPARTA

By Anton Lines

IT'S A BIZARRE THING to look around your apartment and see everything you own sitting in boxes, ready to be shipped off to another country. In fact, by the time you read this, all of it – and me – will be gone. However, right now I'm sitting at my desk (the only piece of furniture still here) writing this column and wondering how I should be feeling. Strangely, perhaps, I'm not thinking about the past. I have so many memories of my life in South Africa, especially as a gamer and writer, but it's two weeks until the date on my ticket and all I can think about is stepping onto that aeroplane and getting the hell out of here.

THE END

I'm very, very glad to be leaving South Africa. When I tell people this, it usually provokes a flurry of heated patriotic indignation, or at least a pitying shake of the head. I should be at least somewhat sad, shouldn't I? I should be thinking about what I'll miss, getting all sentimental about biltong and lamenting the overseas weather conditions, right?

But that's exactly it. I've just recounted the entire case against emigration. Aside from the people in my life – who I'd miss just the same if I was moving to Cape Town – biltong really is the only regret I'll have about leaving. And since I actually prefer the rain and overcast skies to the weather here, there is nothing about the UK that doesn't excite me. It's not that there's nothing attractive about South Africa, it's just that you'll find almost all of it elsewhere. The unique aspects of South African life simply aren't compelling enough to offset the country's endless problems.

The personal safety issue alone is enough to motivate emigration, but since this

THE UNIQUE ASPECTS OF SOUTH AFRICAN LIFE SIMPLY AREN'T COMPELLING ENOUGH TO OFFSET THE COUNTRY'S ENDLESS PROBLEMS

is a gaming magazine, I'll try to be relevant. So, here are three simple things I'm looking forward to about living in Europe:

1. EUROPE HAS THE INTERNET

I spent about a minute on Google, looking for Internet service providers in the UK. The first one that cropped up was Tiscali Broadband. Through this particular company, it costs roughly R250 per month for 8Mbps, uncapped, unshaped ADSL. Free modem and installation. And the UK is far behind countries like Sweden and Germany when it comes to connectivity. I mean, they only ping 40 to the mainland. Disgusting.

2. EUROPE HAS A GAMES INDUSTRY

Never again will I have to wait an extra four months for a local release (as we all did with *Quake 4*). Better still, I like the idea of my hobby not attempting to bankrupt me. While, rand-for-pound, games cost roughly the same here as in Europe, you have to remember that by the same logic if I worked as a waiter in the UK I'd be earning twelve times what I do now.

3. EUROPE HAS A GAMING COMMUNITY

The miniscule size of the South African scene is largely responsible for our poor competitive performance overseas, not to mention the downright mediocre standards of those who do compete. In Europe, however, I'll be able to play with the top international stars, attend major tournaments and actually find skilled opponents online for games other than *Counter-Strike*.

For what it's worth, it looks like I'll still be writing for *NAG* after the move, so you'll get to hear firsthand if I'm right about the gold-paved gaming avenues of First World Europe. And you'll also be the first to know if I'm wrong – which has, of course, never happened, and remains as unlikely as ever. **NAG**





DAMMIT IT'S GOT TO START SOMEWHERE...

By Megan Hughes

THERE COMES A DAY in every gamer's life when he or she must face some hard truths. Many will hide behind the façade of angry utterings, both typed and verbalised, and seemingly 'tough' nicknames. But eventually they will, too, have to fess up. It's a shameful experience, but gaming cannot be possible without experiencing its full force. And now, it is time for me to be brave and let the truth be known.

I AM A NOOB

There. It's done. Let it stand there in all its black and white shame. Even after close to eight years of gaming, it's still true. Granted, eight years give me some experience that others don't have, but only in a limited capacity. I, like so many others, found a few genres that I liked (because, although they were challenging to me, they didn't seem all that impossible to master and becoming proficient was not going to require me giving up my average, but satisfying, social life) and never dared try other genres more than once. Logic told me that if I was happy with what I had, why try anything else.

But the time comes when you can no longer hide behind your own gaming collection. A time when you must enter into a new world, about as armoured as an old naked man, because it's the only way to know what you've been missing.

Every time

BUT THE TIME COMES WHEN YOU CAN NO LONGER HIDE BEHIND YOUR OWN GAMING COLLECTION

you try a new game, you're a newbie or n00b. That's a fact. It is a necessary step in becoming better at the game: start from the lowest level and improve your skills to climb your way out of the label. This, of course, is a whole lot easier to do in the privacy of your own home. It might even be fun to lose when you're on your own and you can laugh at yourself without others joining in. It can even be an enjoyable experience to be a newbie among friends who have far superior skills, but are willing to allow you learning space.

Now, try imagine being the only newbie, the only female, the only person who (time for some more honesty) is not that keen on or experienced in the use of any sort of weaponry (real or virtual) in a *Half-Life 2* (I think) LAN shoot-out amongst four testosterone-fuelled and fairly experienced (in this particular game, I mean) males, of vary ages. Now *that'll* fragment any ego (excuse the pun).

Of course, I was hardly given time to learn the controls and so was even more at a loss as to how to work some of the guns I picked up. It was only much later that I was informed that a right-click would have created greater devastation than a left-click (which explained that even if I started shooting first, I was ultimately fragged - I'm not exactly sure if that's the correct phraseology, but forgive me, I'm new!).

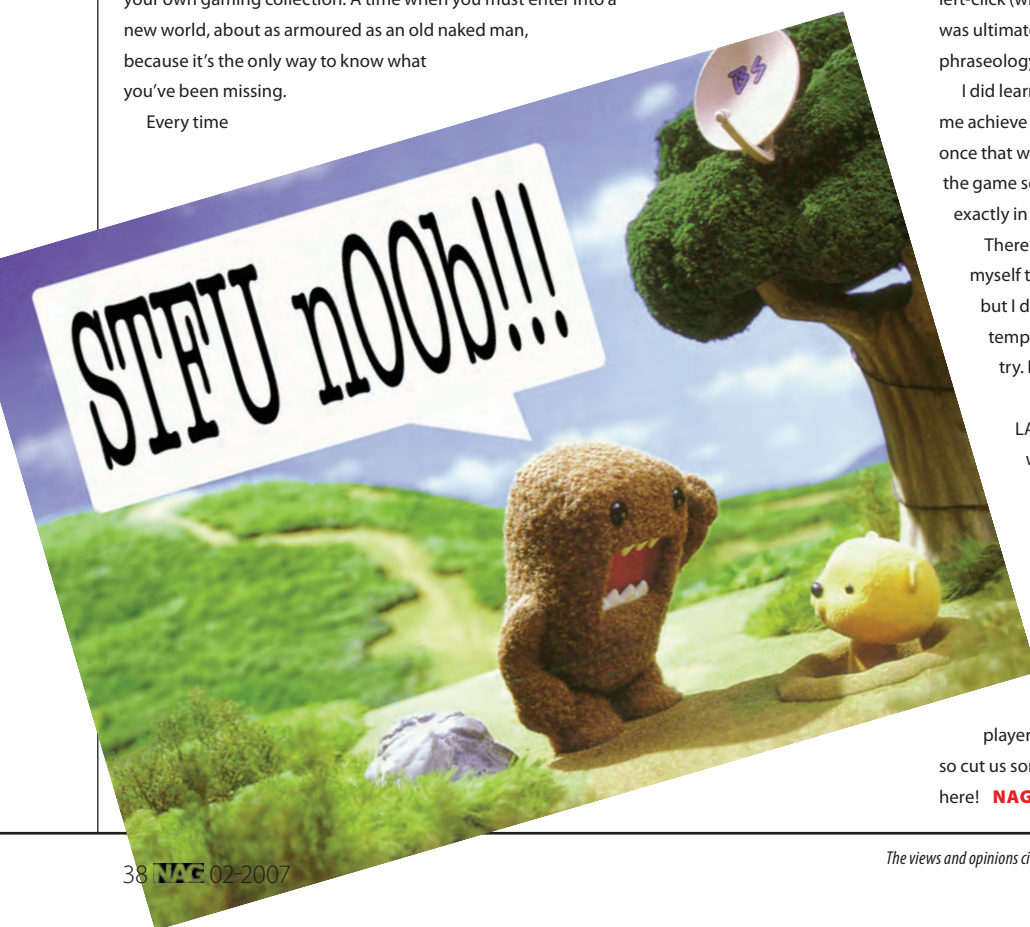
I did learn about camping though. Somehow, it never helped me achieve any frags, though I tried, but I was caught more than once that way. And who decided that it was okay to not write into the game some code that would make sure you didn't respawn exactly in front of the person who just killed you?

There is no doubt that I lost very badly (I will not shame myself twice in my own article by naming the final scores), but I definitely learnt a huge amount about a genre I'd been tempted, but never really had the chance, nor the guts, to try. I also had loads of fun - which is the point, of course.

Now that I've seen how it works, and how much fun a LAN game can be (even if it does involve violence and weapons that I'm as yet not used to), I'm keen to get more involved. And I think there are probably many people out there, too, who want to join, but who have no real idea how to nor any space to try it out without being ripped off for being a newbie.

I say, go for it. Whatever it is you want to try (preferably the legal options), do it and don't let people discourage you.

But, to all the skilled and experienced players out there, remember you too were once a newbie, so cut us some slack and give us some leeway, we're learning over here! **NAG**





KINGPIN

JADED HACK

By Michael James

THE TERM 'JADED HACK' is often tossed around the office whenever opinions differ on something everyone has a passing interest in (the latest *Tomb Raider* game or even *Superman Returns* for example). Our idea of a jaded hack is someone who has played too many games and written too many game reviews and doesn't know how to enjoy playing games anymore. The journalists in this office are accused of being jaded hacks or fan boys all the time. You just can't win. If you really like a game or if you don't like it, you're going to end up being accused of something. This phenomenon also has the potential to infest other areas of our lives, such as not being able to simply sit back and enjoy special effect-stuffed blockbuster movies anymore without commenting negatively on the acting or plausibility of quantum computers and time travel paradoxes. It's sad and depressing and apparently there's no cure. So I guess you should spare a thought for what we have to go through for your benefit – a death sentence handed down to our inner children.

BUT BACK TO ME, MYSELF AND I

It took a long December holiday for me to realise something. I don't enjoy writing a monthly column in this gaming magazine anymore, because there's a perfectly reasonable expectation to make a point and I think I've become a jaded hack with a very specific concentration on column writing. So what if Nintendo sold a hundred trillion consoles, proving everybody wrong, and who cares if Electronic Arts is milking its sports licenses each year? This isn't interesting or thought provoking. It's just a rehash of what everyone already knows or a slightly different slant on something that had been covered to death (try the topics 'originality in games' or 'how games affect the youth'). This raises the other question of what you can really write about that will be of interest to read. If you can think of

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one good original topic, then you have one more than I do. To make matters worse, I suspect we only have opinion columns in NAG because we're expected to have them, just like a table of contents, news section or 'funny' back page. Look at almost any magazine next time you wander past the muscle and fitness or home décor sections; they're all based on the same tired old systems (the only thing that changes is the content). But anyway...

So, my problem is that I just don't have an opinion on gaming worth anything anymore. I don't really believe in opinion columns, and it's a struggle every month to write a readable 'opinion' on anything to do with gaming. I've become disenchanted with the space I'm required to fill each month. I much prefer writing reviews because it means I get to play free games on the latest hardware – the primary reason for me getting into this whole gaming magazine business in the first place (don't look so shocked).

This is also one of the last pages to be designed each month, purely because I keep putting it off for so long. Then there's pressure at the end to come up with something; and creativity under fire never results in literary genius. Therefore, I'm tossing this whole column writing thing out the window and we'll try and find some enthusiastic (read naïve) writer to fill up the space - or we might not (it's harder than you think to find people who can write a few hundred words every month about nothing).

I'm taking a break now to see if I can find something worthwhile to talk about in the future. If I do, this is where it'll appear.

If not, I'll stick to playing games and writing reviews about games - I always find that fun and my inner child is from Krypton.

See what I mean: this whole page was wasted on why it won't be here next month... Sigh! **NAG**



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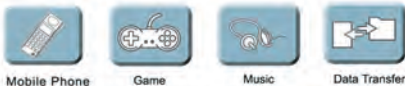


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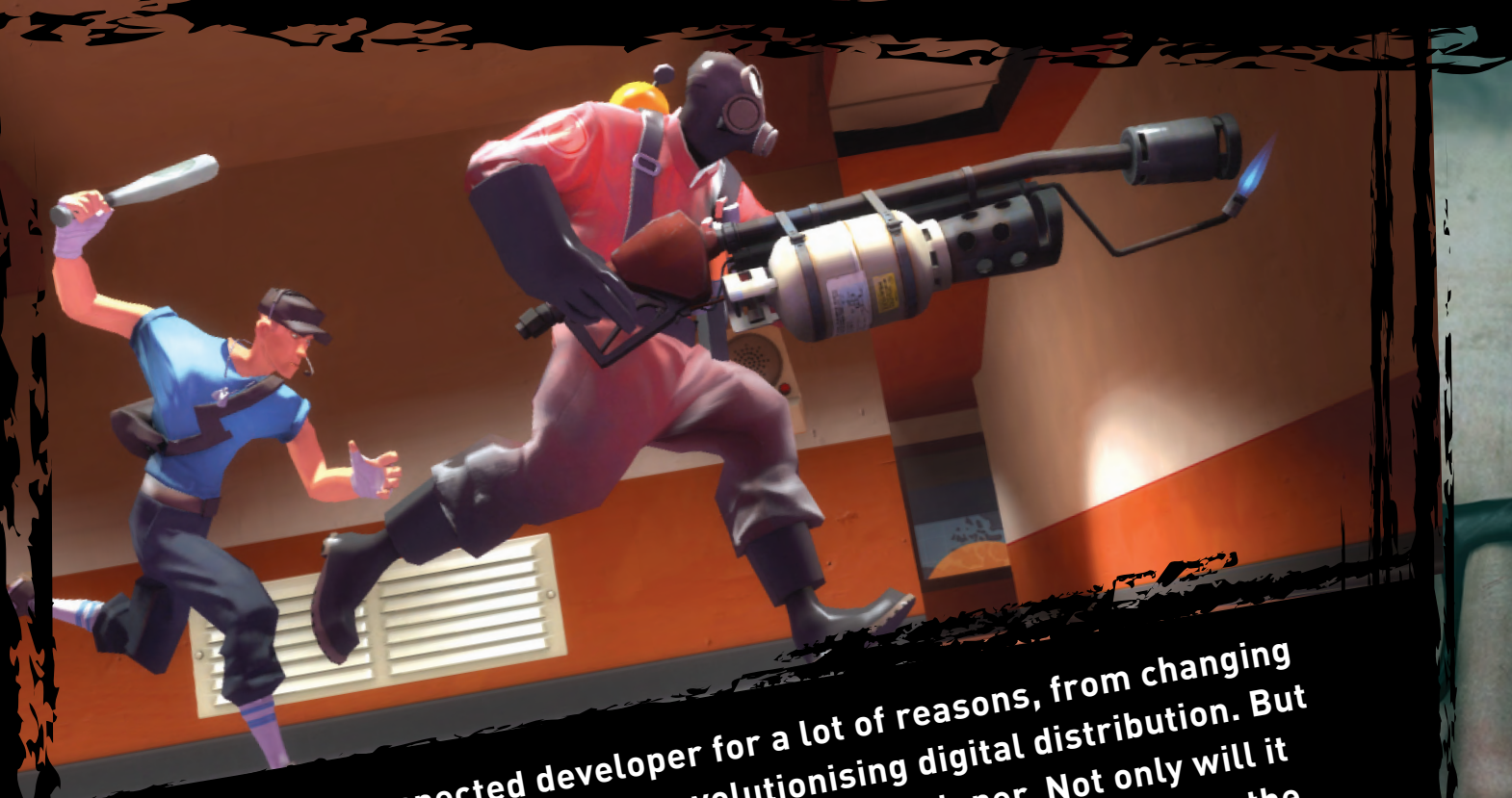
XBOX 360

LAPTOP

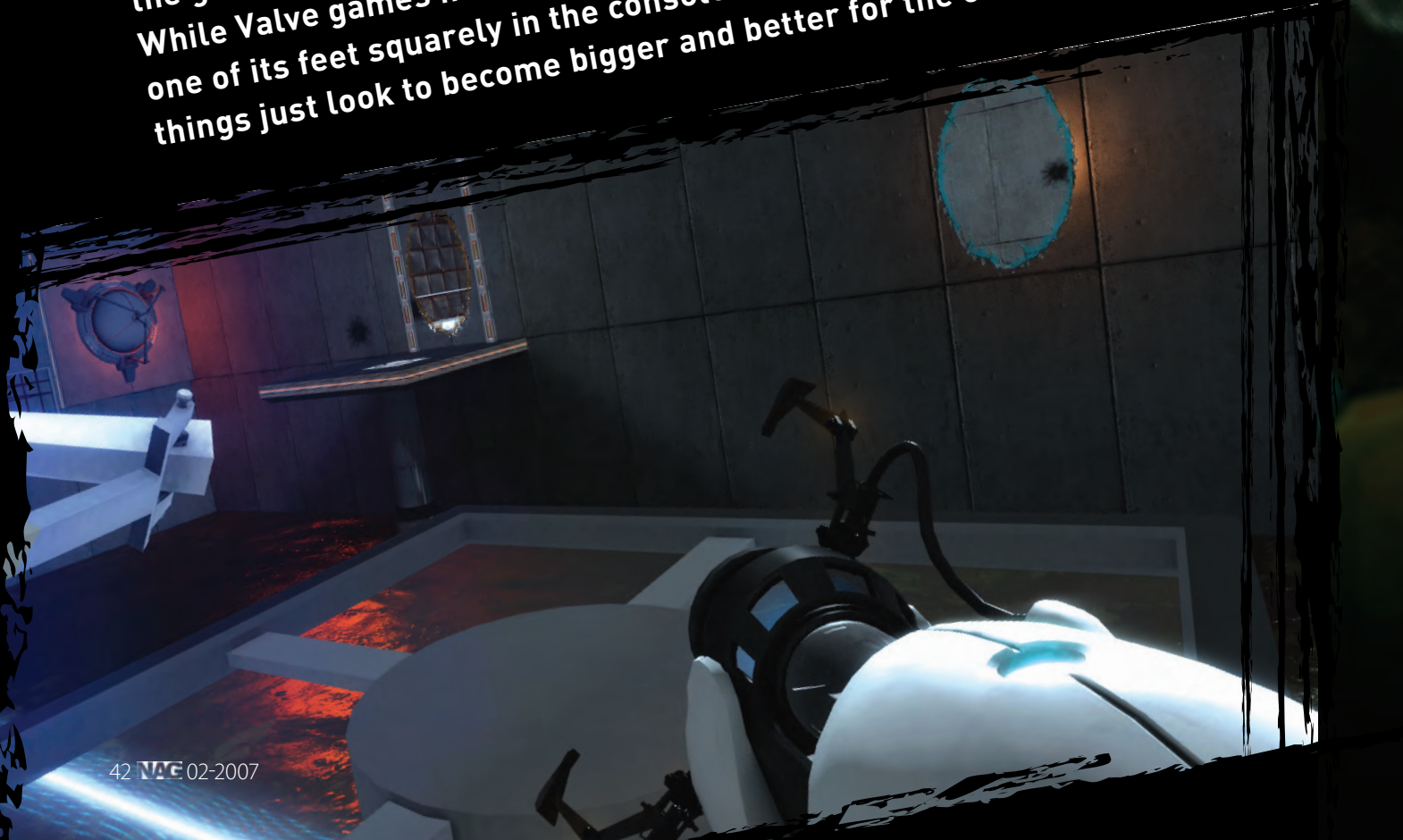
iPods



Touch tomorrow



Valve is a highly respected developer for a lot of reasons, from changing how we experience FPS games to revolutionising digital distribution. But Episode 2 marks a whole new chapter for the developer. Not only will it be the first chapter in the Half-Life episodic releases to really show the effects of user feedback, but it also heralds the return of Team Fortress, complete with a whole new look. On top of that the package includes Portal, a game that wouldn't have seen the light any other way. It is also the game that ushers in a 360-compatible version of the Source engine. While Valve games have appeared on consoles before, this change puts one of its feet squarely in the console market. In short, after Episode 2 things just look to become bigger and better for the company.



HALF-LIFE® 2

— EPISODE TWO —

THERE IS ONE MOMENT frozen in time that utterly defines *Half-Life 2: Episode Two*, and that is when Dog, the robotic pet/companion of Alyx, leaps inconclusively at a Strider in the *Episode Two* trailer. At that instant, fans know that Valve is making this for them. There is a lot to be said about *Half-Life 2* and the first of its episodic sequel, but the one thing that cannot be said is that Valve isn't paying attention to what gamers want from them. The entire shift to episodic has been a testament to this. The original *Half-Life* took two years to develop, but its sequel took close to six years to reach fruition. Gabe Newell, founder of Valve, said that there was just no way they could wait that long to create *Half-Life 3*.

"We left *Half-Life 2* on a cliff-hanger with the Citadel blowing up. Alyx is a couple of feet away from the explosion, so what's going to happen? People were pretty clear that they didn't want to have to wait as long as they had

previously to find out what happened."

Instead, Valve has adopted the episodic approach, letting them tell the story they want to faster, cheaper and with much closer ties to current technological trends and even closer ties to their rapidly growing fan base. The results speak for themselves: *Episode One* was met with critical acclaim, and its smaller, dynamite package left fans desperately needing more.

The upcoming *Episode Two*, often referred to as '*Half-Life 3: Episode Two*', has been delayed a few times already past its announced release date, and is currently scheduled for somewhere in the first half of this year, much to the chagrin of Valve and their fans alike. An unexpected boon to the delays, however, has manifested as much improved visuals with each successive screenshot and trailer released, even past the original release date.

STRIDER BUSTER

A new weapon Gordon can make use of is the Strider Buster. These can be found lying around and tossed using the Gravity Gun. Lobbed at a Strider, it sticks to it like a sticky-bomb, and when shot, pops that bad boy into constituent pieces. The bomb "draws power from the Strider's internal power source," mentions level designer Dario Casali. Apparently, the longer it stays connected the more damage the Strider Buster does once detonated.

KINETIC-SCRIPTED DESTRUCTION

One of the many new technology features introduced in *Episode Two* is that of pre-simulated physics. In an example shown in trailers, a Strider walks up to a house and shoots it to kingdom come, with hundreds of physics-simulated objects blossoming outwards from the explosion. Normally, the processing power required for such a feat would cripple your framerate, but thanks to some new technical wizardry, these situations can be pre-simulated. Fracture lines are painted onto models and simulated force is placed in applicable areas. The result: incredible destruction sequences that look near perfect yet cost almost nothing in terms of CPU power.



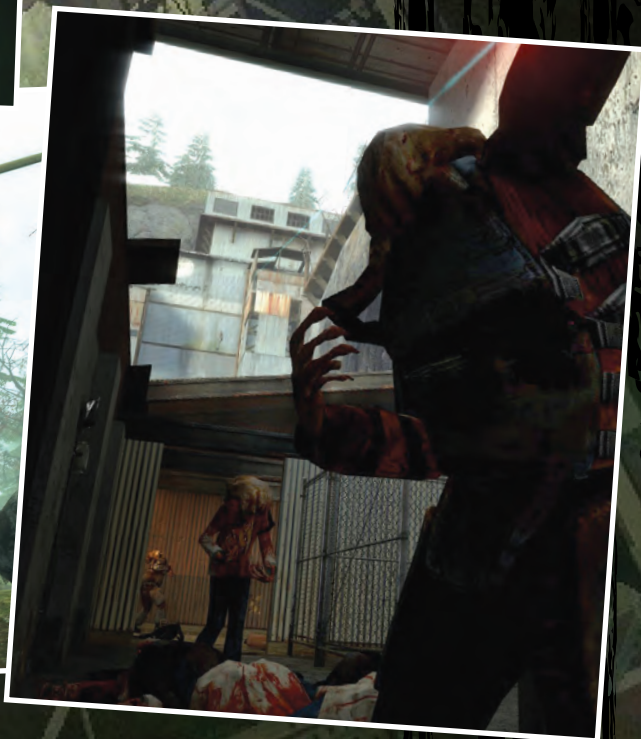
HUNTERS

The Hunters, newcomers to the bouquet of Combine units trying to make you hurt, are vicious pack-logic creatures that hunt in groups of three. A Hunter will keep you occupied with melee attacks, while its two friends flank you from the sides, catching you in the crossfire of their plasma beams. These Hunters are being endowed with as much emotion as Dog himself, letting the player read into their stance and animations what the Hunters are thinking; if they're inquisitive, you'll know, if they're angry you'll know. They can even represent fear, their optics fluttering at the knowledge of their own imminent demise.

"We wanted something that was like the Strider in that it's a synthetic Combine thing," explains Valve creature creator Ted Backman. "It can do lots of cool non-human movements, it can be dynamic and fight you in ways that a soldier couldn't, but also it's a lot smaller than an actual Strider - entering into buildings, chasing you through tighter terrain and relating to you in more of an intimidating, in-your-face, large way."

VORTIGONS

Half-Life 2 already saw Gordon teaming up with the once-enemy Vortigons, but *Episode Two* introduces this camaraderie in a completely new way. Certain parts will see Gordon accompanied by a Vortigon in the same way Alyx helped him out in *Episode One*. The Vort has his recognisable beam attack as well as the ability to charge your suit when you're in dire straits, along with a few other surprises.



Episode Two picks up literally right where *Episode One* left off. Gordon and Alyx are on a train hightailing it out of City 17 before the Citadel goes pop, and you're racing to deliver that mysterious information packet flinched from the Citadel. A team of scientists is standing by to receive the packet, somewhere in the wilderness north of City 17. Thanks to Gordon's ability to be in the right place at the wrong time, the humanity-suppressing Combine are in disarray and scattered, but quickly regroup to cut Gordon off at the pass.

Players will have to fight their way through forests and countryside, vast mines and sprawling farmlands - a departure from the civilisation-centric environments we've come to associate with the series. Taking inspiration from the Coast and Water Hazard sections of *Half-Life 2*, players will have to traverse between skirmish situations on large maps, making important choices about which fights to take on first and where to take a stand. "Some maps are massively nonlinear," says engineer Josh Weier.

A new vehicle, a grungy looking Mad-Max inspired hot rod, helps Gordon to race around the landscape. In response to this new vehicle, Valve even added the ability for a fast zombie to jump and latch onto the vehicle and attack you. While he's there, swiping at your face, the zombie is physically simulated. Steer left and right vigorously, and the zombie will swing around realistically. "It's like in those old

action flicks with the guy on the hood - if you're swing back and forth, then he's swinging back and forth," says Weier. A handy cowcatcher, welded to the front, makes short work of slow pedestrians.

All of this is being delivered along with a completely overhauled physics system and a new dynamic lighting and shadowing system, as well as several improvements to the engine allowing for dense foliage and wide, open spaces. The dynamic lighting system now lets light sources cast dynamic shadows, and character models are now self-shadowing and cast shadows on nearby characters. The physics system now supports large interactions between real-time physics and scripted animations. One example is the destruction of a large metal-girder bridge that warps and bends realistically as it collapses into a ravine below. To help these new additions along, multi-core processor support has finally been added.

Little is known about the inevitable *Episode Three*, other than that it will be the conclusion to this three-part story arc. However, Gabe Newell has expressed interest in perhaps doing expansion products that add onto existing episodes. "There's a lot of fun stuff there to explore." There is no doubt, however, that perhaps a few more story arcs are being considered if the '*Half-Life 3*' arc manages to gather enough interest from fans and newcomers alike.



AFTER YEARS OF FALSE STARTS, TEST CANDIDATES AND GENERALLY LEAVING FANS IN A QUANDARY OVER ITS EMERGENCE, TEAM FORTRESS 2 IS HEADING TO THE PC AND 360 WITH A NEW LOOK BUT THE SAME OLD-SCHOOL MULTI-PLAYER ACTION.

1. SOLDIER

Compared to the rest of the units, it might not seem that appealing to be a soldier. But as the TF2 trailer demonstrated, these guys are pretty resilient when it comes to rocket jumping. Yes, the soldiers rocket-jump a lot, and then some. Got a guy with a big weapon on the bridge? Jump over him and shoot a rocket at him when you land!

2. HEAVY

Have gun, will mow down. Much like the guy from Predator, the heavy unit uses his chaingun to cut swathes through the enemy. Obviously he's going to be a slow mover and will probably have problems with the likes of the scout and spy, but two or three heavies on an assault are bound to do a lot of damage.

3. ENGINEER

In some games the engineer often only fulfils his sapper role, carrying ammo for the troops. But a few take this class further, letting him build turrets and other defences. That role was, of course, pioneered by Team Fortress and TF2's engineer stands ready with shotgun and turrets in hand.

4. SCOUT

The scout in TF2 resembles a baby-faced teenager, though that would be hard to notice if he isn't standing still. Speed is this class's strength, as he quickly swoops through the enemy base's corridors, nabbing the flag and annoying the bad guys.

5. DEMOLITION

What can we tell you that the name of the class doesn't say? The demo guy will make things blow up and is one of the classes that is getting a major overhaul.

6. PYRO

Pyro guys walk around in cool masks and trench coats, carrying two tanks on their backs and weapons that spew flames. Traditionally the Pyro is a tough and difficult class to master, but Valve hopes to tweak it into a more appealing choice. Flamethrowers, after all, rock.

7. MEDIC

The medic's ability to spread disease might not be retained, but apparently the class has been gutted and changed to be much more effective.

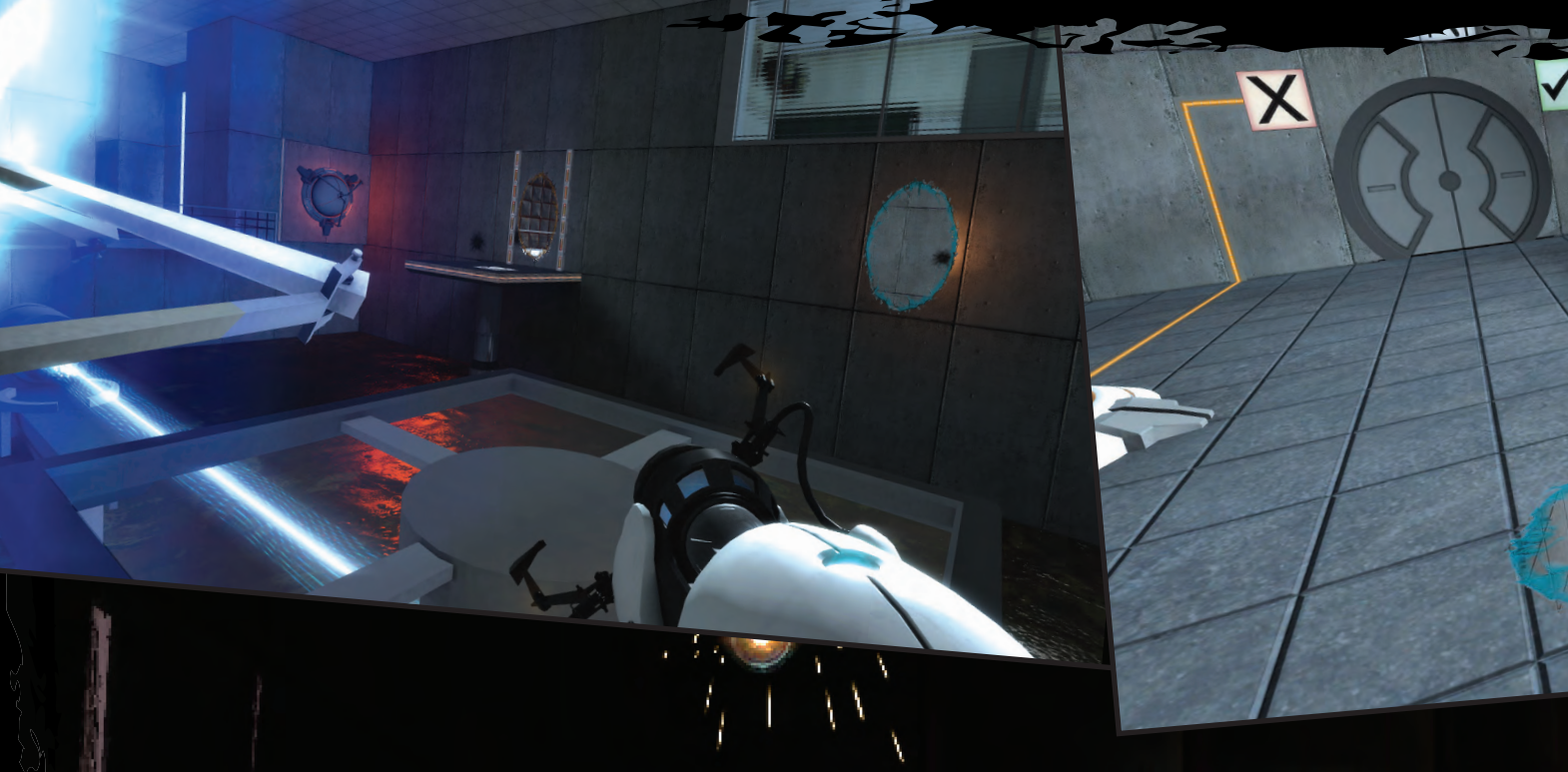
8. SPY

The spy might not be able to play dead anymore, but he did gain cloaking technology to disappear into thin air and the means for small, quiet kills. Silent but deadly indeed.

9. SNIPER

As you might guess, the sniper will be able to hit targets from long distances. Nothing more has been revealed, but everyone likes being a sniper (most just suck at it).





PORTAL

HOW *PORTAL* CAME TO be reads like a rags-to-riches story: some students of the DigiPen Institute of Technology (collectively called Nuclear Monkey Software) developed an independent freeware game called *Narbacular Drop*. Their senior game project, *Narbacular Drop* consists of navigating a dungeon using a rather innovative portal system, where the player controls two interconnected portals, which can be placed on any non-metallic surface. Some Valve employees noticed the game while visiting the annual DigiPen expo, which showcases the games of graduating students, and now the entire original development team of *Narbacular Drop* is employed at Valve and working on *Portal*.

Set in the *Half-Life* universe, *Portal* sees the player controlling a test participant in the Aperture Science Enrichment Center. Handed an 'Aperture Science Handheld Portal Device' (ASHPD), players are required to perform a variety of 'tests', guided only by an electronic female voice, which is both comical and slightly creepy. "Failure or refusal of a test likely result in death," she reminds the player, "although it may not be permanent." The dry comedy angle of *Portal* is provided by the writing duo originally responsible for the (now defunct) gaming commentary/comedy Website Old Man Murray (www.oldmanmurray.com), and is an interesting change of pace concerning puzzle games.

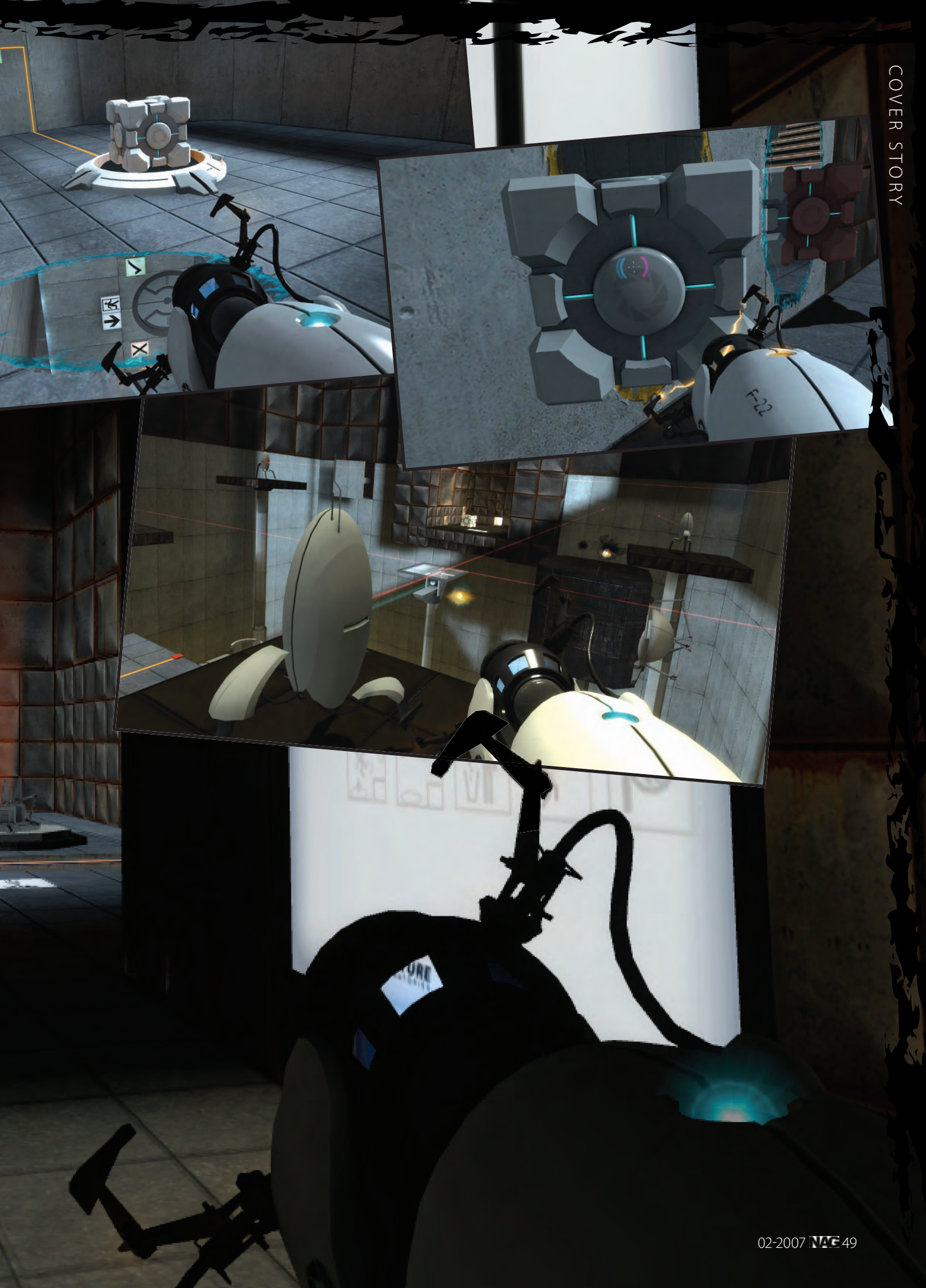
Your goal in *Portal* is, in each level, to reach an exit. You cannot simply walk straight to the exit; reaching it will require creative use of your ASHPD. The environments are filled with hazards and platforms, which can only be circumvented or navigated by using your portal-creating technology in interesting ways. The ASHPD itself works like this: you can create one orange portal and one

blue portal, which are linked through time and space. What goes in through one portal comes out the other, and vice versa. Laser beams, balls of energy, boxes, turrets, and even you will happily traverse any distance from one portal to the other. Portals can only be created on concrete surfaces, and many levels contain surfaces you cannot pass through. One simple puzzle involves trying to get past an automatic turret intent on perforating you. By creating a portal under it from a distance (portals are created under your cursor, any distance away) and slapping the partner portal on a roof somewhere, the turret drops through the hole and out the other portal. Another way is to create a portal against a wall and one under the turret, which shoots the turret out sideways from the wall to have it harmlessly fall over. Many of the puzzles can be approached in a variety of ways, Valve assures, which should lead to some rather creative solutions that even the map designers never thought of - the true sign of a good puzzle game (*The Incredible Machine* springs to mind).

Visually, *Portal* seems both clinically drab and interesting, the 'test subject' nature of your own existence a stark contrast to the visuals in *Episode 2*. The Source engine is still being put through its paces, however, as the portal rendering technology has to deal with some rather interesting problems with non-Euclidean space geometry (translation: confusing situations where objects appear twice in the same universe, despite there only being one in existence).

Portal is set to be roughly three hours in length as a value-added title strapped onto the release of *Half-Life 2: Episode 2* (along with *Team Fortress 2*).

"Both cake and grievance counselling will be available at the end of the test should it be desired." **NAG**



PREVIEWS

2007 AHoy!

GOOD RIDDANCE TO 2006. Sure, it was a great year for gaming, with the release of three next-generation consoles and a host of hot games flooding the market. Nevertheless, we're pioneers, damn it, and we prefer to look to the future and what it may bring. Thus far, the future looks bright and shiny, possibly even bump mapped. The PC especially seems to have had a revival in terms of games, with dozens of quality titles on the horizon. This month, the What We Want takes a look at some PC-centric titles we're anxious to get our hands on, to give ourselves a break from the Xbox 360 and its heathen console-ness.



MYTHOS

DEVELOPER: Flagship Seattle **PUBLISHER:** Flagship **PLATFORMS:** PC **GENRE:** Online RPG **RELEASE DATE:** 2007

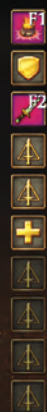
THERE IS DEFINITELY SOMETHING to casual games and digital distribution. Why else would *Hellgate* developer Flagship open a second studio to focus on just that? However, there's more to the story. Flagship Seattle's first game, *Mythos*, will be a test bed for *Hellgate*'s own multiplayer component. Details are scant about *Mythos*' plot, but it will be a casual online RPG, possibly something in the vein of action RPGs past. The solitary screenshot released shows cartoon goblins, a caped hero and something bathing in its own aura. Flagship Seattle draws from a wide range of industry experience, including games like *Total Annihilation*, *Dungeon Siege*, and online RPG *Fate*. However, the really interesting news is that Flagship has expanded into this new direction. *Mythos* will be digitally distributed in 2007, before *Hellgate*'s release, so that means really soon.



ORCS & ELVES

DEVELOPER: Fountainhead/id Software
PUBLISHER: EA Mobile
PLATFORMS: Mobile
GENRE: RPG
RELEASE DATE: TBA

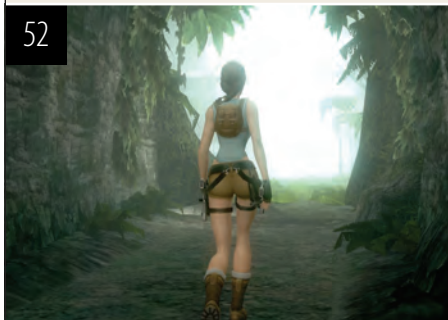
ARE YOU READY for a world of swords and sorcery packed into over five hours of action-packed gameplay? The latest press release for *Orcs & Elves* is so excited about the game that you'd be tempted to snipe at id Software for doing something else than rehash the age-old first-person dungeon crawler of the eighties – though it looks a lot more like one made in the nineties. However, mobile phones have given developers a new type of genesis: the place where they can live out their 8-bit dreams, progressively moving up the ladder as Nokia and its peers push out models that are more powerful. id Software is involved in a small capacity, but Fountainhead worked with the studio before when it developed *Doom* RPG. First-person games on your mobile phone. Go back seven years and convince someone that it'll happen.



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WHAT WE WANT (FOR PC)...



WORLD IN CONFLICT

Responsible for the highly enjoyable *Ground Control* and sequel, Massive Entertainment returns with *World in Conflict*: a chillingly authentic Cold War scenario where the Berlin Wall never fell. It's 1989, and the Soviets, fearing collapse, advance into Europe. Players will take control as field commander, leading powerful machines into war.



DISCIPLES III: RENAISSANCE

The *Disciples* series has gone mostly unnoticed in this country, despite being a pristine example of turn-based fantasy strategy (much like *Heroes of Might and Magic*). The third addition to the series sports new 3D visuals and a host of new functionality. Perhaps now, with a third title in the series, it'll make it to our shores.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

DEVELOPER: Ubisoft
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
PLATFORMS: All but PC
GENRE: Platformer
RELEASE DATE: TBA

WHILE IT IS BAFFLING that greater cartoon heroes like The Tick never got the resurrection that it deserved, we're happy to see the Ninja Turtles back and heading towards a new CG movie due in March. That same month the game will also be released, hitting most platforms near you. According to the development team, it was inspired by the darker mood of the movie, so it might be a license dud. Nevertheless, this game marks a new publisher for the quartet – perhaps Ubisoft will bring a fresh side to the license. All four turtles will be playable characters, though there's no indication if four-player co-op will be possible. That was the main problem with Konami's version from a few years ago. Maybe the game will take us back to the old school street fighting and pizza-chomping antics of the original games.



GRAN TURISMO HD

DEVELOPER: Polyphony
PUBLISHER: SCEI
PLATFORMS: PS3
GENRE: Racing
RELEASE DATE: TBA

GRAN TURISMO HD MIGHT be swamped with controversy after the unpopular move to sell many of the cars online instead of in the game, but that hardly matters when you consider the rabid fans of the series. GT fans simply will get *Gran Turismo HD*, essentially a high-def remake of *Gran Turismo 4*. Nevertheless, the remake will not only include much higher detail and more animations, but also new tracks and new cars. As such, the game will have two flavours. The Classic version will include nearly all that there ever was in the GT series, but made to look nicer on an HD display (reportedly over 750 cars and 55 tracks). In contrast, the premium package will feature far less in terms of cars and tracks, but these car models are super-detailed – apparently taking up to six months to model individually. There's no way fans of the best car game around won't take one of these options.



ARMORED CORE 4

DEVELOPER: FromSoftware
PUBLISHER: Sega
PLATFORMS: PS3, 360
GENRE: Mech
RELEASE DATE: Q1 2007

ARMORED CORE 4 DIDN'T make its shipping date, something the gaming press predicted after playing the early code at TGS last year. However, the delay also had to do with the game's announced inclusion of the 360, but that move was probably a bit obvious when you consider how popular From's other mech game, *Chrome Hounds*, has been. Mech fans regard *Armored Core* very highly, and its release is much more anticipated. If you haven't guessed yet, the game will involve piloting large walking metal robots armed with big guns. The goal is usually to blow up other large metal robots and any smaller enemy combatants you might encounter. Mech games have varied drastically in their realism and sci-fi authenticity, but AC4 looks headed to strike a balance between simulation and action-packed battles – much like *Chrome Hounds*.



CALL OF DUTY: ROADS TO VICTORY

DEVELOPER: Amaze Entertainment
PUBLISHER: Activision
PLATFORMS: PSP
GENRE: Action
RELEASE DATE: Q1 2007

FIRST, THERE WAS *HELL'S Highway*; now WW II games have *Roads to Victory* as well. Following close on the heels of EA's PSP version for *Medal of Honor, Heroes*, Activision has dispatched its *Call of Duty* franchise to lead its own assault on the PSP. This isn't a port of *Call of Duty 3*; in fact, the location shifts from France to the antics of Operation Market Garden, the failed push into the Netherlands. Three different characters will be played during the campaign in a game that is much more focused on single-player than *Heroes*. The action will be made a bit easier with an extensive auto-aim feature, but the developer says that will be balanced by adding a lot more enemies to shoot. Basically, *Roads to Victory* looks to be the most action-packed COD game so far – quite something considering the hordes in COD3.



THE WITCHER

This has been floating around forever, and still hasn't been released. Yet, we're still quite anxious to be the hero, travel across vast areas, visit places, and dismember monsters in this gritty-looking action RPG from the almost utterly unknown developer CD Projekt Red. *The Witcher* will be their first game.



DIVINE DIVINITY 2

Little is known about this fully 3D sequel to the obscure RPG *Divine Divinity* from Larian Studios, other than perhaps this time around they might see fit to hire more than one voice actor. Many happy hours were spent laughing at the female Elf in the first game, voiced by the same man who voiced the gruff dwarf and elderly mage. "Lanlinor, nooo!"



RAGNAROK ONLINE 2

Going full 3D (seems to be the year for it), *Ragnarok Online 2* is the sequel to possibly one of the most popular MMORPGs on the planet, and sports several new features such as levelling equipment, a proper emotion expression system, a complex Job system and a new Speciality Job system. More ways to waste the hours, we say.

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Developer

Crystal Dynamics

■ Publisher

Eidos Interactive

■ Distributor

WWE (011) 462-0150

■ Genre

Adventure

■ Release Date

TBA

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

IF YOU WERE AROUND in 1996 and played the original *Tomb Raider* when it was released, we have no doubt that when that damn T-Rex stumbled out of the jungle for the first time, you soiled yourself. We know you did. It's no surprise then, that Eidos saw fit to have the first 'trailer' for *Anniversary* feature the T-Rex, if only in implication (those feet can't belong to anything else).

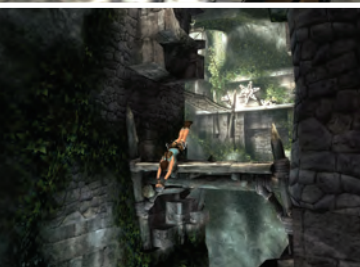
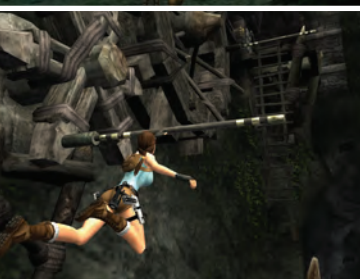
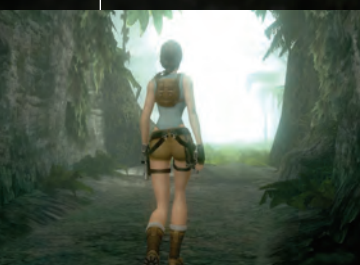
"This game is for the fans," Eidos announced along with news of the remake, and that much is very clear. The trailer itself sports possibly every single memorable moment from the first game: raptors, bears, and pistol acrobatics; all just to entice the fans.

Anniversary will use the *Tomb Raider: Legend* engine along with all its graphical wizardry, sporting a newly modelled Lara and several enhancements such as improved interactivity, a bigger arsenal of weapons and, according to Eidos, all the original levels from *Tomb Raider*. The additions found in *Legend*, such as the PDA and magnetic hook, won't be in *Anniversary*, though initial reports do speak of a grappling hook, which should add much more depth to the puzzles and action.

Anniversary won't be a 1:1 remake however; it will follow the same basic plot as the original, building on it with new features and enhancements. One confirmed addition is that of the new pole-hop move, allowing Lara to jump from narrow pole-top to pole-top if you have precise timing. Her classic Browning 9mm pistols make a return, along with the much-loved dual Uzis and shotgun. Also making a welcome return (since it just isn't *Tomb Raider* without them) are the bears, wolves, bats and raptors that hounded Lara throughout her first adventure. Thanks to the *Legend* engine, gone is the grid-based movement and in are controls that are more flexible. Lara can now shimmy along ledges at different speeds, and you no longer need to stand at just the right spot to make a jump, since Lara can now hold onto several surfaces. The slow-mo aspect of *Legend* may appear in *Anniversary*, but nothing has been confirmed yet.

Considering that the earlier Core attempt at a remake was cancelled, fans should consider themselves lucky that *Anniversary* has been given the go-ahead with Crystal Dynamics at the helm, no doubt due to the success of *Legend*. **NAG**

"SOMETIMES, TO UNDERSTAND YOUR PRESENT, YOU HAVE TO GO BACK TO YOUR PAST, AND THIS TIME, THINGS WILL BE DIFFERENT" - LARA CROFT.



THE LEGACY OF LARA

Tomb Raider (1996)

Tomb Raider II (1997)

Tomb Raider III: Adventures of Lara Croft (1998)

Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation (1999)

Tomb Raider: The Lost Artifact (2000)

Tomb Raider: Chronicles (2000)

Tomb Raider: Curse of the Sword (2001)

Tomb Raider: The Prophecy (2002)

Tomb Raider: The Osiris Codex (2003)

Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness (2003)

Tomb Raider: Quest for Cinnabar (2004)

Tomb Raider: Elixir of Life (2004)

Tomb Raider: Legend (2006)



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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Developer

EA Canademics

■ Publisher

EActive

■ Distributor

EA South Africa

■ Genre

Sport

■ Release Date

Q1 2007



NBA STREET HOMECOURT

BEFORE THEY PLAYED THE big games, the NBA's basketball superstars came from more humble beginnings. Long before endorsement deals gave them bling and fans fawned over their every move, these stars learned the game on their home courts, playing against local neighbourhood kids and adults. These courts ended up defining much of what the NBA stars think of the game, and many of them still return and support their home court eagerly. When we talk about a home court, you might think the stadium where the star's team is based, but *NBA Street Homecourt* goes back to the roots of the players.

The fifth game in the series (but the fourth console release), *Homecourt* is clearly building on two things. First, there's the surprising success that EA has had expanding basketball titles to street courts. The second is the current wave of graphical improvements happening across most of EA's sports and combat titles, courtesy of the new generation of consoles. Therefore, the graphic fidelity of *Homecourt* is without question, as you can see from the images released so far. This level of detail is partly thanks to the team's extensive

research. Apparently, the 10 or so courts in the games have been scrutinised with over 1,000 detail photos of each, as well as interviews with locals who use the court. Let's not forget the NBA stars themselves. *Homecourts* will include courts from stars like Rip Hamilton, whose origins are in Coatesville, and Carmelo Anthony's beloved Baltimore turf.

For the first time an area that actually has several courts will let players use any of the courts. The trademark aggressive play and mild cheating, seen in previous series releases, will also be back and in full force. EA has worked on the control system, but the real difference in *Homecourt* will be that players will have to take on the NBA stars and beat them on their home courts to gain respect. This will apparently also reflect the grass-roots theme of the game – as one EA dev puts it; you'll get to experience where NBA stars were schooled in basketball.

However, unless you are a big NBA fan, a lot of this appeal might be lost. In the end, it will depend on how good a basketball game *Homecourt* is. Considering how EA has perked up its most recent sports releases, *Homecourt* should come out just fine and look exquisite. **NAG**

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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Developer

Harmonix

■ Publisher

Activision

■ Distributor

Megarom [011] 234-2680

■ Genre

Rhythm

■ Release Date

Q1 2007

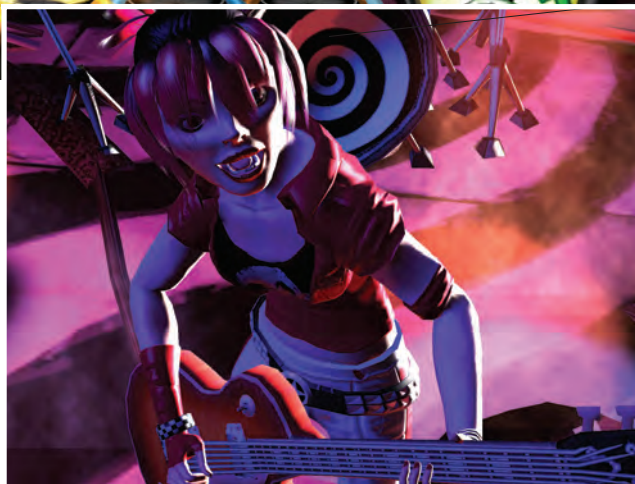


GUITAR HERO 2

IT'S VERY UNFORTUNATE THAT *Guitar Hero* took so long to make it to the local market. The problem is, of course, the guitar controller, which not only increases shipping costs, but probably would also seem intimidating to a local scene that isn't used to specialised peripherals for a game. People still scoff when they see someone with a *DDR* mat. However, *Guitar Hero* is one of the most enjoyable games around, and if you have two controllers, it's instant party magic. The catch is that everyone likes guitars and everyone wants to feel like an Eddie van Halen or Jimmie Hendrix. In the end, most of us live that fantasy with a healthy bit of air guitar.

Guitar Hero was 'Air Guitar the Game' and *Guitar Hero 2* simply pushed everything up to 12. With the PS2 version already available overseas, *Guitar Hero 2* has shown that developer Harmonix noticed how fanatically people played the first game. Consequently, the sequel is more challenging, but even more fun. The various difficulty modes are still there to help beginners and push the more skilled players, but the real changes are to the multiplayer mode. A new co-op mode allows two players to play together, with one taking the lead and the other the rhythm or bass, depending on the song. A new pro head-to-head mode also finally puts to rest arguments over who really is better, since both players now have to play the complete song, not alternate with each other. However, the most significant change to multiplayer games is that players can now set respective difficulties. That means you don't have to die of slow boredom on easy mode while your cousin demonstrates an ambitious lack of rhythm. Instead, put them on easy and show off playing the song on hard.

The 360 version of the game, appearing a good few months after the PS2 release, not only sports its own guitar (hopefully wireless), but ten additional songs, reportedly capping the game at 70 songs. The play list is already impressive, ranging from Nirvana's *Heart-Shaped Box*, Rage Against the



Machine's *Killing in the Name* and Primus's *John the Fisherman*, to Danzig's *Mother*, Rockabilly anthem *Psychedelic Freakout* and arguably the guitar anthem above all, *Freebird*. Alas, no *Stairway to Heaven* or the guitar/banjo duel from *Deliverance*, but online downloads will be on Live, so we can hope. There will also be an online leader board for the heavy-duty air guitar players.

The PS2 version is great, so *Guitar Hero 2* on the 360 doesn't look like it will disappoint. **NAG**

No More System Crash



ASUS P5B-VM DO supports Intel vPro technology with exclusive system recover design

The ASUS P5B-VM DO is one of the best boards I've tested that far that supports Intel's vPro Technology, which is the next-generation digital office platform. The board features the Intel Q965 Express chipset and supports the Intel® Core™ 2 Duo processor, the foundation of vPro Technology, to offer remote out-of-band manageability, improved security, and energy efficient performance.

Q965 Express Chipset

The Q965 Express Chipset is built for business with features such as Active Management Technology and Matrix Storage Technology. It is also a key ingredient of the Stable Image Platform Program. When combined with the Core 2 Duo processor, this new chipset delivers the most advanced manageability, data protection, collaboration and stability capabilities to help address businesses' top concerns in the areas of asset management, safer computing and support for energy efficient performance.

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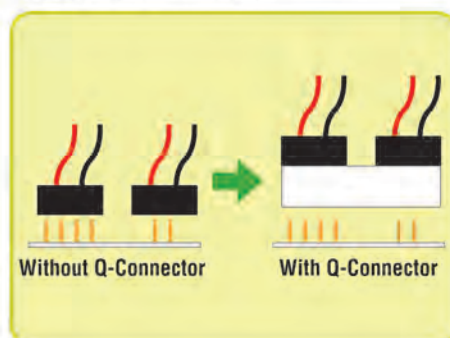
Trusted Platform Module (TPM) system stores keys (for encryption / decryption), digital certificates, passwords, and data. A TPM

system also helps enhance network security, protects digital identities, and ensures platform integrity.

AI Lifestyle Features Bring out the Best of Intel vPro

Q-Connector allows connection and disconnection of chassis front panel cables in one easy step with one complete module. This unique adapter eliminates the trouble of plugging in one cable at a time, making connection quick and accurate.

ASUS Q-Connector



AI Lifestyle Series motherboards combine lifestyle and personal computing, and provide excellent system performance to enjoy graphic-intensive games and applications. The P5B-VM DO comes equipped with several AI Lifestyle features to bring out the very best of the Intel vPro technology.

Advanced Q-Fan enables smooth fan speed adjustments, and eliminates the sudden burst of noise caused by abrupt fan speed acceleration.

CrashFree BIOS 3 restores corrupted BIOS data from a USB flash disk containing the BIOS file. This utility saves users the cost and hassle of buying a replacement BIOS chip.

EZ Flash 2 is a user-friendly BIOS update utility. Simply launch this tool and update BIOS from a USB flash disk before entering the OS. You can update your BIOS only in a few clicks without preparing an additional floppy diskette or using an OS-based flash utility.

If you're looking to upgrade to the vPro platform, I urge you to select the ASUS board. It's that good. I give it a two thumbs up.

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Developer

High Impact Games

■ Publisher

SCEE

■ Distributor

Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445-7960

■ Genre

Platformer

■ Release Date

Q1 2007



RATCHETT & CLANK: SIZE MATTERS

THE MECHANICALLY ABLE CAT and his very mechanical chum are back, but this time on Sony's smaller platform. Say what you want about the PSP, the first party license support for it has been growing steadily, handsomely rewarding PSP owners who stuck to it. Sure, you don't get games at the frequency of DS titles, but where else can you get a set-top console experience in a handheld? That part is critically important, and fortunately, *Size Matters* appears to reflect the same quality seen in another recent PSP debutant, *Daxter*, sporting controls and gameplay very similar to the PS2 releases.

Fans might worry that Insomniac, *Ratchet & Clank's* creator, is not developing the first PSP game from the series. That team recently celebrated the release of their new game, *Resistance*, so the PSP title has been left to High Impact Games. It's probably not reassuring that *Size Matters* will be the team's first game, but so far the game looks very polished. It also says something that both Sony and Insomniac entrusted High Impact with this job. *Size Matters* is a new adventure, picking off right after *Deadlocked*. The two are lounging on the beach when a small girl named Luna arrives and pleads for their help. Apparently, she's on the run from someone, but obviously, she's not telling the whole truth. With the story in place, Ratchet and Clank have an excuse to run around multiple levels, taking out foes with various weapons and traversing platforms with leaps, bounds and the special abilities Clank can produce. This version will also reward players occasionally with pieces of armour. While a set of armour, once complete, gives the duo more abilities and bonuses, combinations of different types of armour will give other more unique abilities as well.

On the multiplayer side, the game will support both ad-hoc matches and skirmishes in infrastructure mode. The staples of deathmatch, team deathmatch, and CTF will be available, as well as a new mode called the Iron Lombax - players will have to competitively complete objectives on the respective stage being played. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Developer

KOEI Canada

■ Publisher

KOEI

■ Distributor

TBA

■ Genre

Action/Racing

■ Release Date

2007

FATAL INERTIA

SET IN THE 23RD century and featuring hi-tech hovercars, *Fatal Inertia* takes a step out of its own paradigm by using physics as its primary combat axis. Instead of launching volleys of flak grenades or heat-seeking ballistic missiles at opponents, *FI*'s weapons are designed to temporarily affect vehicle performance. The primary weapon (and basis for most other weapons) is the magnet, which hampers speed, handling, balance and drag, and generally makes a great nuisance of itself. Land a magnet on an opponent's right wing, for example, and the vehicle will veer inexorably off to the right. Confirmed weapons include cluster bombs that detonate on proximity and toss magnets hither and yon, rocket-boosted magnets that – when attached to an enemy ship – will ignite and throw the vehicle off-course, and the perennial favourite, an EMP that will cripple all electronic devices in the vicinity and drop

surrounding hovercars out of the air. Due to its sophisticated physics engine, furthermore, the game features destructible environments that can be used to a player's advantage – for example, rocky outcroppings can quickly become avalanches to thwart opponents.

The game offers four vehicle classes, each with their own strengths and weaknesses, while all classes are also highly customisable, from flashy paint jobs to pimping spoilers. Built using *Unreal 3* technology, *Fatal Inertia* features eye-popping visuals, including all sorts of fancy weapon effects and gorgeous environments, which range from woodland tree-dodgems, swamp-infested jungles, and dusty canyons, to windswept glacial ridges and lava-strewn wastelands. With a full multiplayer mode on the cards, this could turn out to be the next-gen racer experience we've been waiting for. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Developer

Deadline Games

■ Publisher

Eidos

■ Distributor

WWE [011] 462-0150

■ Genre

Action/Racing

■ Release Date

2007

CHILI CON CARNAGE

FOLLOWING 2005'S TOTAL OVERDOSE, CCC is neither a sequel nor a complete handheld port, but rather a sort of spiritual successor. TO's gun slinging gringo protagonist returns, once again with an enormous (tortilla) chip on his shoulder, a daddy to avenge, and a clutch of evil mobsters to turn into chunky salsa.

While there are hordes of baddies to smear all over the walls, the game's promised carnage is not so much about the numbers, but the style in which you rack them up. The more outrageous the kill, the more points you earn, and the more devastating your multiplayer damage becomes. At the heart of all this flagitious slaughter are all sorts of gnarly combos, and Danish developer Deadline Games has claimed that especially dextrous and nippy players should be able to finish an entire stage with just one giant combo. Using combos effectively also enables Ramiro to use bigger and better weapons – so run up the nearest wall, somersault, and headshot those suckers on the way down to snag yourself some real meat-grinders. The game also features collectible power-ups called Loco Moves, including an apparently irresistible piñata you can toss into a group of Mexicans that will explode in their startled faces. Bosses include a mad old hag that tosses explosive chickens. In addition, all of this drubbing is made easy by an intuitive control system that locks onto targets and a slow motion control for lining up all those combos.

El Gringo Loco, the main single-player campaign, trots out nineteen missions, as well as a number of unlockable challenges, while the arcade-style El Macho mode offers straightforward high score butchery. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Developer

Red Storm

■ Publisher

Ubisoft

■ Distributor

Megarom [011] 234-2680

■ Genre

Tactical Action

■ Release Date

March 2007

GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2

G.R.A.W. WAS AN INSTANT hit with tactical shooter fans everywhere, so a sequel was inevitable. The visual experience offered by the original title has been vastly improved, bringing *G.R.A.W. 2* to a whole new level in which the players can immerse themselves. There is an upgraded communication system boasting a whole range of new features, such as enabling players to see in full screen mode what their allies are doing. The AI has also been vastly improved, with enemies actually having the same command over their squad as you do. They will try to flank you and set up sniping positions on rooftops, amongst other things. Your team has also been improved, and not only will they follow your every command, but they will also now tell you the exact details of the enemies or targets that they have spotted. They will consult with you on new tactics before they deploy and

be a bit more helpful in spotting any threats that you might have missed.

G.R.A.W. 2 will add a new class of soldier. The medic will heal everyone in the team if possible, including the player's own character, while in combat. Obviously, it would be smart to make sure it isn't he who is taken out. Players will also now be able to call upon air strikes at any time, as well as use an artillery MULE to replenish their munitions, which, if need be, can be used for cover in near impassable situations - just be careful what you leave in sight.

There is, of course, the multiplayer support, aiming to bring the *G.R.A.W.* series back to the forefront of the Xbox Live gaming scene. But despite all of that, the details are sparse. Yet, we think it's unlikely Ubisoft will want to screw up such an anticipated sequel. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Developer

ALTAR Games

Publisher

Ascaron

Distributor

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Strategy/RPG

Release Date

March 2007

UFO: AFTERLIGHT

THE NEXT INSTALLMENT OF the *UFO* series has finally revealed itself in the form of *UFO: Afterlight*, and this time you play from the perspective of a minuscule group of humans who have been exiled to Mars by their grey-skinned enemies. From a self-sustaining base on Mars, humanity tries to tame the hostile red planet. Not only do players have to deal with the extreme environment, but also sentient sentinel robots left there by an ancient race.

Afterlight features characters with detailed backgrounds as well as highly personalised skills and attributes. This all adds an incredibly strong RPG aspect to the game, but it doesn't abandon its turn-based strategy roots. There is also a nice mix of management and diplomacy to be found with players needing to balance training and using characters.

When a character goes in for training, he is unable to be used until his training is finished. That will obviously impact on mission planning and defending against those pesky alien attacks. Another cool feature is that the environment can be used to help or hinder players, since most objects are destructible. This should bring interesting tactics to the already-tense *UFO* action sequences. The player also will need to adapt his/her strategies throughout the game, as the enemies learn from their mistakes and grow stronger. This means that there will always be a difference in every mission.

Will this be the game to restore the *UFO* legacy? We're not sure if we'll make that call yet, but *UFO* fans definitely want that to happen. Maybe *Afterlight* will be the change the series needed. **NAG**



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REVIEWS

WEB SCORES

CALL OF JUAREZ [PC]

NAG [100]	84
Metacritic [100]	75
Gamerankings [100]	76



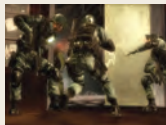
KNIGHTS OF THE NINE [PC]

NAG [100]	79
Metacritic [100]	81
Gamerankings [100]	82



RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS [360]

NAG [100]	92
Metacritic [100]	89
Gamerankings [100]	89



GOTHIC 3 [PC]

NAG [100]	64
Metacritic [100]	62
Gamerankings [100]	65



JAWS [PC]

NAG [100]	75
Metacritic [100]	48
Gamerankings [100]	54



VIVA PIÑATA [360]

NAG [100]	89
Metacritic [100]	85
Gamerankings [100]	86



WWE SMACKDOWN VS RAW 2007 [360]

NAG [100]	80
Metacritic [100]	80
Gamerankings [100]	80



WARHAMMER MARK OF CHAOS [PC]

NAG [100]	73
Metacritic [100]	74
Gamerankings [100]	75

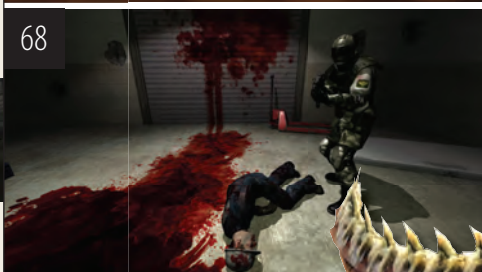


The ratings in this section, apart from the NAG ratings, are not the opinion of NAG Magazine. Duh. All scores were correct at time of printing.

64



68



96



99

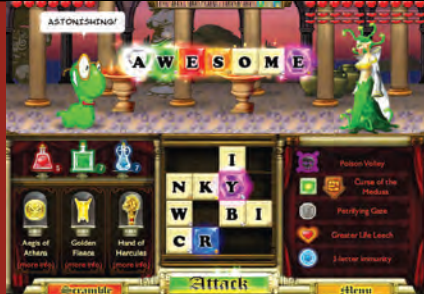


WHAT WE'RE PLAYING...



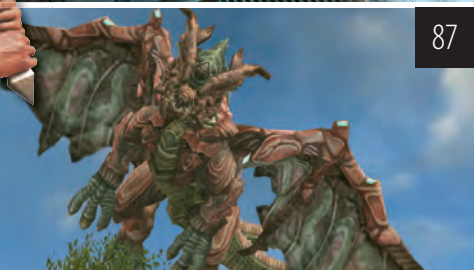
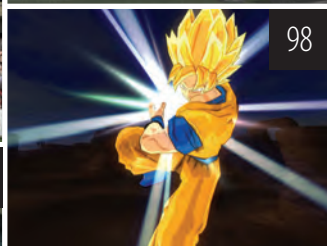
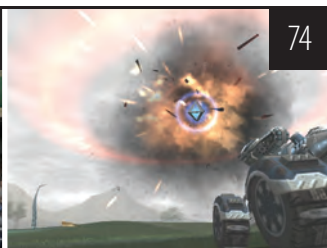
SAM & MAX: SITUATION COMEDY [PC]

James cannot stop playing with his vitriolic dog detective and sarcastic big-headed rabbit, but we don't blame him. The second episode in the *Sam & Max* episodic release, *Situation Comedy*, picks up where the first episode left off and goes from there. However, where does it go? James won't say. He's just mean.



BOOKWORM ADVENTURES [PC]

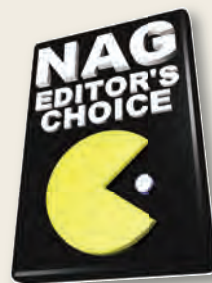
Nobody is safe from the addictiveness that is *Bookworm Adventures*, sequel to the highly successful and verbose PopCap game, *Bookworm*. You build words from a grid of letters to attack foes that stand between you and total literary domination. Check out the demo for yourself at www.popcap.com. You won't regret it, unless of course you think 'cat' is a big word.



AWARDS

EDITOR'S CHOICE

This prestigious award gets bestowed upon games that really catch NAG's collective eye. The Editor's Choice award is for games that have some indefinable trait that just make them stand head and shoulders above the rest, peering about nervously. Usually, games that are fun, visually stunning and which leave a lasting impression are honoured with the coveted Editor's Choice. It's almost similar to knighthood, but not as humiliating!



CLASSIC AWARD

Any game that scores above 85% gets the much-envied Classic Award in honour of its achievement. Above 85% represents a game that has managed to set itself apart from the crowd of mediocrity – a game worthy of some attention. Games awarded the Classic Award are games you can trust.



SCORING

NAG is different, NAG is special. We score games on the 50% principle, meaning that we regard 50% as 'average'. It's neither here, nor there. 50% is the perfect middle ground. A game that scores 50% is a game that does nothing wrong, but nothing right either. If a game won't install properly, naturally it scores less than 50%. If a game brings something new to the table, or does what it does well, it'll go up from the 50% average. 60% is above average, a game that might appeal to some. 70% is a game that's pushing its own limits slightly, one that's perhaps putting a new spin on common ideas. 80% represents a game with a difference, one of quality and as few rough edges as possible. 90% is outstanding, a game that has separated itself from the horde to do its own thing, and does it well. No game will ever achieve 100%, because if a game ever did, we'd be out of jobs. Nobody would play anything else anyway.



RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS [360]

Locally, *Vegas* has picked up an impressive multiplayer crowd who duke it out almost every night on Live. The online cooperative modes certainly helped, as well as the fun but difficult Terrorist Hunt mode. Sadly, the recent patch removed our favourite feature - the ability to hear the opposing team's voices if they were close enough, which forced people to whisper.



SUPREME COMMANDER BETA [PC]

Total Annihilation fans have been drooling over the Beta since release, clawing at the Ranked Battle button until it yields an actual opponent you can connect to. We're no different, and sending our Commander unit into the enemy base and forcing a nuclear suicide on it has never been more fun. We still refuse to believe Chris Taylor actually had anything to do with the game.



ASSAULT HEROES [XBLA]

It's cute and almost cuddly in its nostalgic nature. *Assault Heroes* on Live Arcade is a traditional scrolling shooter where you drive your little buggy around and shoot incoming enemies, usually with a friend at the helm of a second buggy. You can link up attacks and even get out of your car to reach hard-to-reach power-ups. Adorable.

RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS

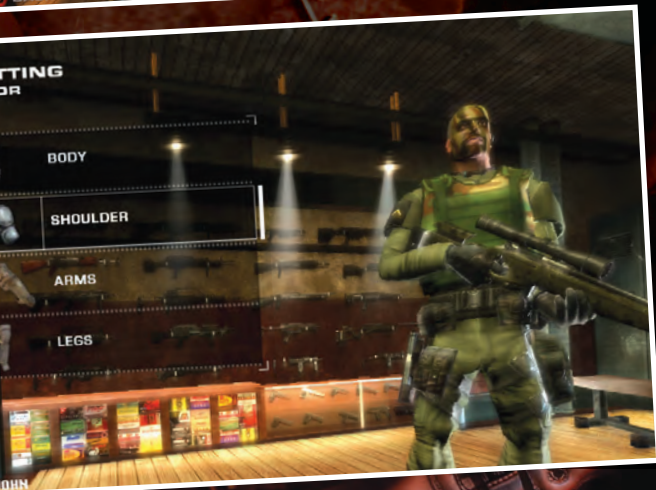
BECAUSE IT SHARED A viewing perspective with such games as *Half-Life* and the *Quake* series, FPS enthusiasts were confused by *Rainbow Six*'s emphasis on tactically heavy gunfights, one-shot kills, and planning. However, at the same time, *R6* re-realised the tactical shooter genre that had never caught on before, and paved the way for games like *Vietcong*, *Ghost Recon*, *SWAT 3*, and *The Regiment*. The Tom Clancy name (and the *Rainbow Six* series) is the name behind the tactical shooter genre, which is why they're the ideal team to do a definitive Hollywood-style action shooter. Admittedly, it could be argued that the classic Tom Clancy 'formula' has been sacrificed in light of playability, but unless you are one of those diehard players who actually used the Eagle Watch mode, you're probably not going to miss the elements that have been 'arcadified'. While it does feature a very stylish and dynamic interpretation of Special Forces engagements, it almost miraculously retains the precision, the tension, and the coordination the previous games have always drawn their core gameplay from. To be more succinct, it's a fairly close-to-perfect blend of close-quarters combat sim and arcade shooter.

Most situations in *R6: Vegas* need to be approached from multiple angles, and therefore smart command of your squad is often the difference between passing the section and having to reload from the last checkpoint. This is implemented with a dynamic order system that feels similar to the one used in the Xbox version of *Lockdown* (or similar to the one used in *Star Wars: Republic Commando* for the PC). Along with the 'streamlining' of the planning system is the ability to pick up weapons and ammunition from dropped enemies - again, a new feature to the series for

PC gamers, but familiar to people who played the console counterparts. One feature that has been typical of *Rainbow Six* to be changed is the health system. Whereas with every previous game your character started healthy, and if he or she were shot, would stay injured for the rest of the mission, *Vegas* encourages looser tactics by having your health regenerate over time.

Visually, *Vegas* more than performs according to the platform's standard. A big difference between *Vegas* and its predecessors, however, is its emphasis on the dramatic. Muzzle flares have been exaggerated, and the newly introduced cover system allows the player to see his or her character. A big puller of the Xbox games has been the stylish use of rappelling, and *Vegas* is no exception. Quite often, the player is encouraged to clear a room by rappelling upside-down and then crashing in through the window. The abundance of cinematic sections helps keep the game fresh throughout its single-player campaign, as well as giving the game a dramatic visual flair. As usual, the selection of weapons and their configurations is plentiful.

Apart from the standard storyline campaign, players also have access to the familiar terrorist hunt game types, as well as split-screen cooperative multiplayer. *Rainbow Six: Vegas*' style, finesse, design, and general execution all complement its overall quality, and make it an exceptional entry into the *Rainbow Six* series. Although the emphasis on split-second combat and tactical domination may alienate fans of the more standard first-person shooter, its general polish and excellent single-player should please anyone willing to enjoy it. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

Platforms

Reviewed on 360

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R555

Developer

Ubisoft

Publisher

Ubisoft

Supplier

Megaron [011] 234-2680

Genre

Tactical Action

Age Restriction

18

Specifications

Players: 1-2

Online: Yes



BOTTOM LINE

A new look and feel is just the tip of the iceberg in a complete revamp of the *R6* series. Vegas is one of the best in the genre's history.

92/100

Rainbow Six: Lockdown



S.W.A.T. (the movie)



MULTIPLAYER:

When logging into Xbox Live, players are presented with the Personal Elite Creation (or PEC), which is essentially a persistent unlock system. In this interface, you get to outfit your character with weapons and equipment, and with armour and clothing. Although there is an inevitable abundance of the clichéd balaclava'd heavily armed commandos, the level of customisation means that even a bunch of guys dressed the same don't always look the same. Once everything has been unlocked, you are given quite a huge selection of helmets, vests, shoulder pads, accessories, and camouflage patterns. What's more, your armour covering affects your character once in-game. Armour does actually reduce the amount of damage you take, but also slows you down.

Vegas has a multitude of game types, including standard deathmatch, team deathmatch, capture the flag, assault and defend, and even cooperative play through the single-player campaign. Although the cooperative play is completely functional, it's important to note that it is missing the story elements, and is therefore obviously a different game. The co-op is not comparable to the one in *Gears of War*. Playing a multiplayer game earns you experience, which unlocks more equipment and weapons, meaning that your character can look progressively cooler and more unique the more you play. Thankfully, all of the fast roping and rappelling dynamics have been included in the multiplayer section, meaning that battles are every bit as dramatic as the scripted ones in the single-player campaign.

PC REVIEW

Aside from a slightly fiddly default layout of the squad command keys, the PC 'port' (although we can hardly call it that) is functional and quite competent. Obviously, it does take quite a meaty machine to play with all the details cranked up, but the PC release is essentially the exact same game (although with the lack of dedicated hardware, PC gamers will be stuck with a game that probably will never look quite as good as it does on the 360). Nevertheless, aesthetics aside, Vegas for PC is more than an adequate dose of potent squad-based tactical for the gamepad-shy.

PARAWORLD

THAT'S RIGHT. WHAT WE have here, ladies and gentlemen, is a real-time strategy game with dinosaurs. If you're thinking there has to be some kind of catch, you'd be completely wrong. It's exactly what it says on the box and far better than you might think. Not only does it exceed all expectations, but it also flushes away the thinking that games that sound too good to be true probably are.

For a change, the story links up well with what happens in the game. Plenty of short video sequences tie everything together in a meaningful way, and these never degrade to just pointless distractions between playing sessions. The plot involves three human characters (who are all playable hero units in the game), a parallel world that just so happens to be populated with dinosaurs, deceit and deception, and a healthy dose of conflict. This parallel world also has a radical climate, and players will find themselves fighting through thick jungles, deserts, and frozen wastelands. These climactic extremes add heaps of variety when it comes to the art direction in the game, resulting in diverse settings that are further diluted by the odd town-based missions that see players guiding their heroes around a city while taking out plundering pirates. There's even a Roman-styled gladiator arena mission where your three hero units must face ever-increasing waves of enemy units, culminating in a final showdown with an angry Tyrannosaurs Rex. All this graphical variety makes the game refreshing to play because you never really know where you'll be playing next and it all goes a long way to break up the 'collect, build and fight' monotony usually associated with real-time strategy titles. Further to this, the single-player campaign unfolds across three different tribes (Norsemen, Dustriders and Dragon Clan), each with their own distinct graphical style and unique units and buildings. The difference between the three tribes runs deep. Not only do they look different, but they behave differently, each with their own style of resource collection, base defence, and special abilities.

REAL-TIME STRATEGY

This genre is largely tapped out when it comes to innovation, and while *ParaWorld* is essentially a standard real-time strategy game with the usual resource collection, base building, and army massing dynamic, it manages to throw enough unique elements into the mix to avoid being labelled as standard issue. One such example is the army controller: this is a side panel with unit portrait slots all arranged in various levels. You can only have a set number of units in the game at any stage, making which unit or how many units and of which level you build next a strategic process. It also doesn't help if your workers occupy some of these slots, so creating too many workers will limit the number of fighting units you can build. The levelling system is also strategically important. For example, a level three archer is more expensive than a level one archer is, but you can create more level one archer units as opposed to level three archer units. This level tree has a single level five slot, three level four slots, and eight level three slots, eventually ending in



twenty-five level one slots. It's also possible to promote units up through the levels. To further complicate things, your hero units also take up slots, but promoting hero units up through the level slots has benefits as they gain special abilities such as enhanced healing, high damage single shot weapons, and even the ability to build special buildings such as advanced defence towers. This whole system works extremely well at balancing the game, forcing the pace, and limiting the mass production of units. From a play dynamic point of view and depending on the difficulty setting, most missions do end up playing the same, building your base, and attacking the enemy base. Here and there, you'll guide a limited number of units and your heroes through the jungle to reach an objective while fending off the wildlife. In another mission, you'll have to build a giant structure to launch a primitive airplane, and some will see you defending a special structure. The bottom line here is that the game is diverse and exciting to play thanks to the way the action occasionally takes a break from the tried and tested real-time strategy formula.

FOSSILISED REMAINS

For all the good *ParaWorld* does it also suffers from the same problems that seem to plague all games in this genre. For starters, the artificial intelligence isn't too bright and will continue to pound away at a heavily defended entrance with the same unit allocation along the same route until you end up taking the fight to them. Once you learn the 'system' on each level, it becomes far too easy to fortify and protect certain areas of the map to limit damage to your own units and buildings until you can amass enough of an army to wipe out the opposition. It would have been much better to see the PC-controlled units trying different things or at least bringing a bigger force to the party after each successive defeat. This problem ultimately makes the game too easy and most seasoned players will have no trouble working through each of the missions without having to reload. The other inescapable problem is monotony. With little challenge from the opposing force, most missions play out in exactly the same way: collect resources, build a base, defend the base, build an army, and then smack the tar out of the enemy. It's not all bad and there is a certain level of comfort to be had in totally dominating each map, but looking back you'll end up feeling that it wasn't that much of a challenge. Considering all the good things the game brings to the table, making it harder would have upped the ante considerably.

In summary, *ParaWorld* is a fine example of a fun and entertaining game. The lush setting and solid graphics are further enhanced by the addition of 'wild' dinosaurs roaming around most of the maps. The sheer variety on offer here is astounding, with many new and exciting units becoming available throughout the whole game. Even when you think you've seen it all, something new comes along to keep you interested. This is a highly recommended experience that'll command your attention while you play it and keep you coming back for more. Besides, there isn't any other game out there that'll let you strap a catapult to dinosaur and take it into battle. **NAG**



Here a fully armoured Triceratops takes apart based defences



Face the mighty Tyrannosaurus Rex in the unique gladiator arena mission



Some of the levels include city settings and lone missions through the jungle



Your army is on the way to the enemy base for a little 'visit'



VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R299

Developer

SEK

Publisher

Sunflowers Interactive

Supplier

Apex Interactive [012] 347-9956

Genre

RTS

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Players: 8

Spec: Pentium 4 1.6GHz | 128MB Graphics Card | 512MB RAM | 3.4GB HDD | DVD-ROM Internet: Not required

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BOTTOM LINE

It could have been such a disappointment but ends up delivering high doses of engrossing fun and entertainment.

89/100

Earth 2160



Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends



VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R465

Developer

Day 1

Publisher

VU Games

Supplier

MI Digital [011] 723-1967

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

18+

Specifications

Online: Yes

Players: 1

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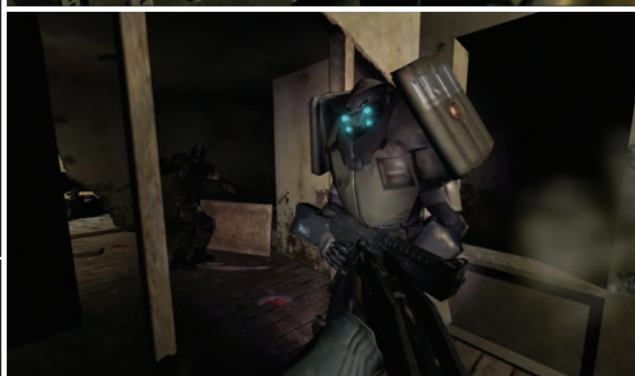
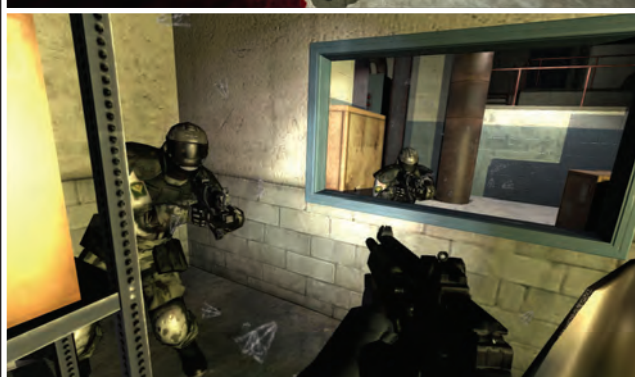
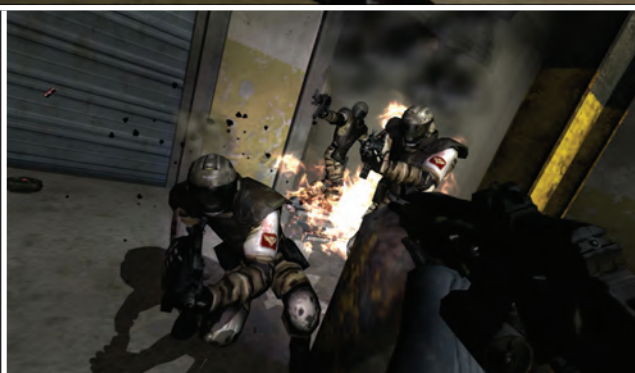
F.E.A.R.

DANGEROUS GIRLS, GUNG-HO OPERATIVES and clone soldiers - it has been just over a year since PC gamers first encountered the world of *F.E.A.R.* This interesting and clever shooter from veteran studio Monolith quickly created a niche for itself, and proceeded to grow that niche with an expansion and the popular *F.E.A.R. Combat* online game. It's also one of the stronger titles in Vivendi's stable, so a 360 version was inevitable.

For the sake of the uninitiated, *F.E.A.R.* starts when a powerful psychic from a government lab escapes and takes control of a battalion of clone super soldiers. As part of the First Encounter Assault Recon unit, the player is charged with arresting the escaped psychic, Paxton Fettel, in the first few levels. However, things are obviously not as simple as that. Apart from the clone soldiers, the lead character also soon starts encountering ghostly visions and bone-chilling flashbacks from his past. Clearly, he is no ordinary Joe from the street. This mystery, though, also grants the player serious combat abilities, including lethal hand-to-hand attacks. Soon the plot leads our man to a skyscraper teeming with the clone soldiers, not to mention something far worse.

The action in *F.E.A.R.* is still as visceral as ever. The main comment made about the game is how one shouldn't confuse the static environments as bland. They only seem so until a firefight between our hero and a squad of soldiers breaks out. Dust flies, plaster breaks, and windows shatter under heavy fire and regular explosions. Likewise, while *F.E.A.R.* doesn't have that many enemy types, the AI more than makes up for it. This is tied together with a fairly average horror plot, creating an exciting and tense game.

Unfortunately, a year shows, and on the 360 *F.E.A.R.* really shows its age. Bearing in mind that the game was released before the likes of *Prey* and *Call of Duty 3*, it sits pretty far back in terms of how it looks. It's another example of how a game is distinctly not pushing the hardware, and one can't help but wonder if the developers couldn't have added more to the game visually. Nevertheless, that barely dents the experience, as it's a well-paced and involving action title that shooter fans will enjoy. The hand-to-hand combat also translated nicely from the PC version. In fact, if *F.E.A.R.* were released as a launch title for the 360 instead of now, it would have looked a lot better. As such, the price tag for the game will be a bit steep for most. It's a pity, since this 360 version is very true to the original. **NAG**



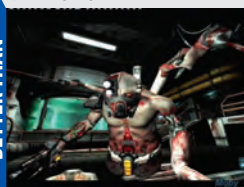
BOTTOM LINE

There's nothing wrong with *F.E.A.R.* on the 360, except that it still looks like the game released on the PC over a year ago.

80/100

Quake 4 (360)

BETTER THAN



Call of Duty 3

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VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R299

Developer

1C Company

Publisher

Ubisoft

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Strategy

Age Restriction

13+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 1.7GHz

Video: 128MB Graphics Card

RAM: 512MB RAM

HDD: 4.0GB HDD

CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Players: 1-16 (depending on game type)

Internet: Supported, but not required

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FACES OF WAR

ANOTHER WORLD WAR II-THEMED game. What can we say that we haven't said a dozen times already in the past couple of months? Yes, the genre has been done to death, and yes, occasionally a title rises above the rest. We have mixed feelings about *Faces of War*. On the one hand, it does some things extremely well, and innovatively, even. On the other, however, it is, after all, yet another WWII war-game.

Faces of War embraces the latest trend in games: physics modelling. The graphics are of a high standard, an effect that is further enhanced by the way in which materials in the game environment behave. Explosions are spectacular, and buildings and just about every object on the battlefield react to forces exerted upon them. This doesn't account for all of the game's interactivity: a player's soldiers can be instructed to interact with just about anything. Any object can be used as cover, and some, such as boxes, can be manipulated in other ways too.

The player controls a limited number of soldiers, supposedly highly trained elites. The game plays as a micro-management-intensive real-time tactics game. Units are usually controlled in a traditional RTS style, but direct control of a unit can be assumed, increasing the unit's efficiency and accuracy. Highly detailed inventory lists are kept for every soldier and even every vehicle. Weapons, ammunition, and other supplies can be picked up, dropped, or passed around. Vehicles can (and often must) be manually fuelled, and it is even possible to siphon fuel out of a

vehicle. Vehicles can be commandeered, and each station on a vehicle, such as a tank, needs to be manned for it to be used efficiently.

On the downside, the control interface, while making a valiant attempt, is a bit tricky. Part of this is likely unavoidable, given the complexity of controlling several troopers' actions at the level of detail available in this game. Consider, for instance, that an average squad of five or six soldiers will often contain one with a sniper rifle, one with an anti-tank weapon, some assault weapons, and a varied assortment of grenades and other equipment and munitions – staying on top of all this can be daunting!

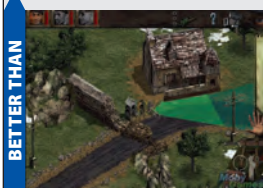
While the graphics and physics modelling are very impressive, there are some minor issues with the sound. In a quest for realism, certain sounds have been made too lifelike, if you can believe it. You will, however, believe it when artillery opens fire and you start fearing for your subwoofer's health! This is surprisingly annoying, as it requires the bass to be turned right down, which negatively affects the remaining sound effects. Another audible problem is an oversight, and is just about inexcusable: while undergoing Soviet training (i.e. the Soviet tutorial) you will hear instructors with very Russian-sounding names yell out various commands and exhortations – in a heavy Yankee drawl! Come on, people, surely this could have been done better! **NAG**

BOTTOM LINE

A very engaging but very difficult and patience-testing war-game. Innovative features are marred by a lack of attention to detail.

70/100

Commandos



BETTER THAN

Company of Heroes



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VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R325

Developer

Creative Assembly

Publisher

SEGA

Supplier

WWE [011] 462-0150

Genre

Strategy

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

CPU: 4 1.8GHz

Video: 128MB Graphics Card

RAM: 512MB RAM

HDD: 11GB HDD

CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Internet: Not required, but available

Players: 1-8

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BOTTOM LINE

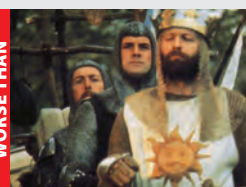
Fans will enjoy this highbrow strategy title, but it's not everyone's type of warfare.

75/100

Previous Total War games



Huns at the door



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

AMONG STRATEGY FANS, FEW have not heard of the *Total War* series, and many have played at least one or two titles from it. The series is well respected in the strategy community, and with good reason. The franchise possesses its own unique identity in terms of style and interface, which remains consistent despite evolving as technology improves. This latest offering takes us back to medieval Europe, with recreations of historic conflicts such as the Battle of Hastings of 1066. This particular one, in fact, is used in the game's tutorial, which is fairly long and extensive. Nevertheless, such an in-depth tutorial is necessary, as the game is fairly complex. Players need to manage their domains on a national scale by erecting various buildings and public works in controlled cities, determining taxation, and controlling production, and must also direct the course of individual battles. As has been the case with previous *Total War* games, this new one also features covert operations in the form of agents that can carry out assassinations, espionage, or sabotage.

The interface consists of two main components. The empire map shows the known world and indicates who owns what territory. This is where the interface has seen the most evolution. No longer are territories as explicitly and glaringly distinct as before; rather, the map has a more organic, less artificial look to it, even though the game world is still divided, now more subtly, into discrete territories. Armies' movements are shown more fluidly, too. The other interface component is the battle view, which is where the martial action takes place. As with previous *Total War* games, the view cannot be scrolled beyond a certain distance from one's troops to simulate the limited tactical knowledge available to medieval generals. The graphics here have also been given a huge overhaul, and detail levels in cities are particularly impressive.

While the game enjoys many technological advancements over its predecessors, the feel remains true. Veterans of the series will find the concepts and methods familiar enough, though the tutorial is still recommended in order to get a grasp of the specifics.

Fans of the accomplished *Total War* series should certainly take a look at this one, as should anyone who prefers a more

(dare we say it?) 'realistic' take on warfare with a historical angle. Those seeking fast and furious action with lots of farfetched fireworks, however, should probably stay clear. **NAG**



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Buzz! The Sports Quiz



R279⁹⁹

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VITAL INFO

Platforms

Reviewed on PS2

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

TBA

Developer

I-Imagine Interactive

Publisher

Virgin Play

Supplier

N/A

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Online: No

Controllers: 1

Players: 1



FINAL ARMADA

TO PUT IT BLUNTLY: there's a good chance you'll never see this game on local store shelves. While it is true that *Final Armada* was locally developed, its main area of release is sunny Spain, not South Africa. The short explanation: publishers. Almost any question related to *Final Armada*, such as why it's not sold locally, why it's not a very good game, and so on, can be answered with the word 'Publisher'. *Final Armada* has become a hoarse swansong for local indie developer I-Imagine Interactive. Its development has been plagued by a cacophony of issues since conception.

The most obvious chink in *Final Armada's* armour, which quickly leads to the entire experience falling apart, is that it was obviously nobody's 'baby'. There is no heart or soul to the game. Equally obvious is that the budget-title was put together and finished purely for the sake of it, and it suffers for this. The game itself is a vehicular action shooter with an interesting twist of transport duality. The Aggressor transforming combat vehicle can flip its wheels and go hovercraft at the click of a left stick, making for added manoeuvrability and access to a shield-depleting laser. Comrade in combat, a flying support ship can be ordered to attack specific targets or, once purchased, told to release a rather spectacular 'kill 'em all' attack. Upgrades are bought with points gathered by completing missions, or trudging through the Simulator battles (where the support ship is noticeably absent).

When you hit the first turret mission, things just start to go horribly downhill. It becomes clear that much of *Final Armada* is tacked together: could-be cool ideas thrown into a mixing bowl with not enough care to keep the mix consistent. Boss fights are both impressive and vexing, a series of pattern attacks just slightly misaligned so as to (unintentionally, no doubt) create swear-at-your-screen scenarios, possibly with a controller flung at the cat for effect. The mediocre cut-scenes suffer from the most heinous of gaming crimes and cannot be skipped, something which simply has no excuse. The landscapes suffer from the same bleakness as the character and vehicle design, following a formula of vast rolling nothingness interspersed with a few rocks, the odd alien plant and tight bunches of flora. Oddly enough, the music manages to hold its own and carries itself with powerful block-rocking beats, the kind you tap your foot to without noticing.

The game is a relatively short experience across twelve levels or so - eight hours of game time at the most if you're capable.

Beyond that, the game has no replay value whatsoever, though this is not as big a negative as it could have been due to the budget nature of the title.

Yes, local gamers can take a certain amount of pride that even our little corner of the gaming universe has produced a title for the PlayStation 2 (and PSP), a title which - if it had been nursed and cared about - might have been something to remember. However, much to the chagrin of even the developers, publisher interference and endless consternation during its development have left it a crippled shadow of what might have been. **NAG**



BOTTOM LINE

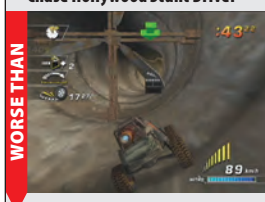
A short, mostly forgettable experience with an awesome soundtrack.

60/100

Most local productions



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ATARI

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R265

Developer

Most Wanted Entertainment

Publisher

Sierra / HD Publishing

Supplier

Midigital [011] 723-1967

Genre

Strategy

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 2.0GHz

Video: 128MB Graphics Card

RAM: 512MB RAM

HDD: 2.5GB HDD

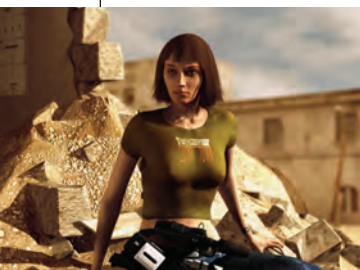
CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Players: 1-8

Internet: Not required, available

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BOTTOM LINE

A fresh strategy game for fans who are tired of all the run-of-the-mill titles.

77/100

Real War



Company of Heroes



JOINT TASK FORCE

ALTHOUGH THE MARKET IS saturated with games based on World War II and the current obsession with terrorism (and most of these are tedious and uninspiring), occasionally a gem is released that stands out from the rest. The former category recently enjoyed the release of *Company of Heroes*, which breathed new life into the tired World War II theme, and now we have an innovative title that explores the present-day, terrorism-dominated theatre of war: *Joint Task Force*. The story revolves around a special task force, recruited from around the globe, with the mandate to carry out dangerous and sensitive strikes against warlords and terrorist leaders.

As this kind of game goes, the story is surprisingly involved and presents more than merely a series of military briefings, with civilian characters making appearances and stirring up trouble from time to time. An interesting angle is the inclusion of a media perception rating. This provides a measure of public opinion about the ongoing operation and influences the available funding: public outrage at inhumane practices will result in budgetary cuts. This value is positively influenced by the successful completion of objectives and the protection of civilians, and is negatively affected by high casualties and by civilian casualties and the like. Some missions are not prone to this variable as there is no media presence at these clandestine engagements.

The game's graphics are symptomatic of where visual technology is heading. Everything is crisp (except, of course, when there is much smoke on the battlefield!) and detailed, but yet realistically antialiased. Scale is portrayed accurately, and objects cast appropriate shadows. Of course, this level of graphical fidelity comes at a price. For best results, a serious hardware configuration is required. As far as the audio goes, you get what you expect: gunfire, explosions, radio chatter, engine sounds, and so forth.

The game dynamic is interesting, as it's a blend of real-time strategy and real-time tactics. Players accumulate funding during a mission, most often by completing objectives. This can then be used to purchase reinforcements. An interesting factor features at this point: each delivery costs money, so it is vital, when the option exists, to fill up the transport helicopter in order to keep overheads down. Larger units are delivered by transport plane, so no such optimisation is possible. Units persist from



one mission to the next, and occasionally one may excel and be promoted to officer status, gaining special abilities with increases in experience.

This is an excellent title and is highly recommended for war-game aficionados, particularly those who have grown jaded and tired of the usual dry fare where modern combat is concerned. While realism has been kept as high as possible, it is not to the detriment of playability and enjoyment. **NAG**

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VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R299

Developer

Tilted Mill

Publisher

Sierra

Supplier

Midigital [011] 723-1967

Genre

City Management

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 1.6GHz

Video: 64MB Graphics Card

RAM: 512MB RAM

HDD: 2.0GB HDD

CD/DVD: CD-ROM

Players: 1

Internet: Not required, but supported

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BOTTOM LINE

A competent city-building simulator, but it falls rather flat when compared to its predecessors. Nevertheless, among the better titles currently available in this genre.

60/100

Medieval Lords: Build, Defend, Expand

BETTER THAN

Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom

WORSE THAN



CAESAR IV

WITH THIS TITLE, Tilted Mill takes over the mantle of Impressions Games, the studio that created *Caesar III*, *Pharaoh*, *Zeus*, *Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom* and their respective expansion packs. Now, Sierra has commissioned Impressions to create a new *Caesar* title, but this time it's in 3D...

The overall game dynamic is very much patterned after that of its 2D predecessors, particularly *Caesar III*. Players must allocate residential zones for varying classes of citizens, supply them with the requisite services, develop agriculture and industry, and usually set up a strong military arm. A new citizen class has been added, falling between the plebeian peasantry and the patrician nobility, the middle-class equites. This group has more sophisticated needs than those of the plebs, but not as extravagant as those of the patricians. Equites take care of the skilled jobs, those that require a certain level of education. Overall, the housing zoning requirements are generally lower than in *Caesar III* or its more recent counterparts, which veterans may find a bit confusing at first, until the relative scales are learned.

Players have several ratings to mind – these reflect the financial strength of the city, its governor's (the player's) standing with the Emperor, cultural development, and so forth. As before, there are advisors that monitor various aspects of the city, such as health, education, religion, commerce and the military, among others. While mechanically this game closely resembles its predecessors in many ways, its 3D nature alters some elements, and whether these changes are necessarily beneficial is debatable. In the previous games, an invisible grid that determined where buildings could be placed covered the map. This has now been replaced by a much finer mesh, which at first may seem like a good idea, as it facilitates free-form building placement. However, this results in a much more haphazard arrangement of structures, and purists and perfectionists are likely to find this quite objectionable. Furthermore, the 'free-form' aspect is largely an illusion, especially in terms of orientation, as buildings can only be rotated in 45-degree increments. Roads (and, frankly, just about anything else) that are aligned diagonally end up looking quite shoddy and somehow out of place, not



to mention that this results in some awkwardness in terms of laying out one's districts.

However, despite the downsides of the 3D engine, it must be said that the graphics themselves are rather appealing. Day-night transitions add to the overall quality by dint of changing lighting tones. However, as is so often the case in games such as this, the cycles themselves are entirely cosmetic, as the citizens appear quite happy to work around the clock, never taking time off to eat or sleep. Weather effects have also been incorporated, though it doesn't appear that these have any effect on game dynamics. They have, however, been well implemented from a visual point of view, with attention to detail. For example, when it rains players may notice puddles forming at the tops of fortified towers, to dry out later when the sky clears.

The missions in the campaign are satisfyingly challenging, so players will be kept busy for quite some time. There is also an online game mode, which allows players to take on custom missions in an attempt to complete them in the best way possible in order to make it into a hall of fame of sorts. **NAG**





GEARS OF WAR

EMERGENCE DAY 17.11.06



Microsoft
game studios

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Jump in.



VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R299

Developer

Deep Silver

Publisher

Namco

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Strategy

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 2.4GHz

Video: 128MB Graphics Card

RAM: 512MB RAM

HDD: 3.0GB HDD

CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Internet: Not required, but supported

Players: 1

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WARHAMMER: MARK OF CHAOS

THE WARHAMMER TABLETOP WAR-GAMING franchise has spawned a number of games over the years, covering both its fantasy roots and its 40000 element. *Mark of Chaos* returns to the roots, with a conflict involving the Empire, the forces of Chaos, the Elves and the Skaven rat-people. Although the introductory cut-scene doesn't present any real narrative, it soon becomes apparent that the game's story plays an important role. As a result, this turns out to be an immensely enjoyable and engrossing single-player game. Regrettably, the two campaigns (Empire and Chaos) run as parallel alternatives, an old-fashioned approach that mars the story line's cohesiveness by presenting two conflicting plots. One would think that the success of games from *StarCraft* onward, which used sequential campaigns, would have been taken to heart in this regard. Nevertheless, the stories are entertaining, even if a little formulaic, and, therefore, somewhat predictable. Voice talent used in *Warhammer 40000: Dawn of War* is recognisable among the leading characters. The voiceovers (and the audio in general) are well executed, with rich sound that supports even 7.1 surround sound configurations.

The game's overall structure is that of a mission-orientated real-time tactics title, with minor elements of overarching strategy. Players begin their campaigns with small armies comprised of a few units. These are, ideally, nurtured from one engagement to the next, earning experience. At certain points in the game, players can also purchase various upgrades to their units, such as improved armour or weapons, or siege capabilities. Players are also able to purchase replacements to refill units that have suffered casualties. At least one hero unit leads each army. Some of these are crucial story characters, but players may also buy a generic hero or two along the way to complement the existing abilities. Heroes can earn many levels of experience, and at each one a skill point becomes available. The skill trees are rich without being excessively complex, though do suffer from some odd quirks such as melee heroes being able to assign ranks to ranged strike skills they will never use (a possible open end for an expansion set, perhaps?).

Players will very seldom be allowed to field an army as large as their total amassed forces, so strategic decisions need to be made regarding what units to take into a battle. Unfortunately, there is very little in the way of intelligence before a battle, so players will mostly find themselves settling on an army

configuration that works, and stick with it pretty much regardless of the mission. Some battles are optional, but this is mock choice – one really should play every battle, as the rewards are more than worth it!

The graphics are truly beautiful, with intricate details depicted on both units and terrain, and with some breathtaking skies. A minor quirk here is that, as players zoom right in (doing the 'game tourist' thing, as it were) to admire the emerging details as they get closer, they will find that grass grows uniformly over both virgin terrain and recently blasted craters – silly! However, over the general course of play the most practical view distance is usually fully zoomed out, so this is largely irrelevant. **NAG**



BOTTOM LINE

Mark of Chaos is a highly engrossing and very well produced game that should appeal to more than just fans of the tabletop war-game it is based on.

73/100

Shogun: Total War



Medieval II: total War





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VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R299

Developer

Obsidian Entertainment

Publisher

Atari

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

RPG

Age Restriction

13+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 2.0GHz

Video: 128MB Graphics Card

RAM: 512MB RAM

HDD: 4.6GB HDD

CD/DVD: CD/DVD-ROM

Players: 1-4

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BOTTOM LINE

Dungeons & Dragons 3.5 Edition is unleashed on the PC. Coupled with a compelling storyline, NWN2 will drain more hours from your life than a twelfth level wight will.

86/100

Neverwinter Nights



Fallout 2



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2

LET'S GET THIS LITTLE bugbear out of the way right at the start: the release version of this game has more bugs than a hyperactive bug-spawning sac out in the middle of the Great Bug Desert of the Lost Bug Continent. You could wax indignant about rushed development cycles and sloppy Beta testing until your throat bleeds, but at the end of the day, there's nothing that the current patch release doesn't kiss better.

Plot-wise, *NWN2* kicks off some years after the events of its predecessor. Your character is a (conspicuously) orphaned nobody, living with his taciturn elven foster father in a crumbling hamlet in the middle of a bog, currently celebrating some sort of bumpkin harvest festival. Suddenly, a horde of extraplanar nasties gatecrashes the party, hacking up the prize piggies and startled bog-dwellers. Before you can say "Episode 4: A New Hope", it turns out that there's something awfully mysterious about your heritage, and you're swept up in a grand adventure.

As one would expect from a *D&D* campaign, everything is delectably complex. Character creation is a fairly lengthy and involved process, with customisable options galore. One of the major departure points from the first game, your henchmen are also now (optionally) completely controllable, giving players the chance to play out the campaign with several classes at once. Dialogue options have a tangible effect on the course of the game, including shifting alliances



There used to be a time when carrying a huge axe didn't draw attention



and factions, as well as influencing your companions' perceptions of you. Bundled with the main story arc, furthermore, is a veritable horde of optional side quests.

The radial menus have been replaced with context menus à la *Fallout 2*, and while it takes a little getting used to, once mastered it works a real treat for quick actions and taking advantage of your surroundings. The inventory system is a bit of a shambles, however, and players might find the party control system a tad clumsy.

While the original campaign is certainly buckets o' fun, *NWN2* ships with an extraordinarily powerful toolset for players to create their own campaigns. If the precedent set by *NWN1*'s rabid builder community is anything to go by, we can expect some rather interesting things to pop out in the months to come. Despite a few niggles, this is a thoroughly enjoyable game that will sink hooks into anyone looking for an engrossing and complex RPG. **NAG**



ASUS EAX1950PRO -

10°C Cooler than Reference X1950PRO Cards

As usual, ASUS continuous to improve upon reference video card designs. This time, with the recently launched EAX1950PRO graphics card series, ASUS included an advanced fan sink that lowers temperature by 10°C compared with competing solutions that decided to stop with the reference design for the X1950PRO GPU.

The all new series consists of two models, the EAX1950PRO CrossFire/HTDP/256M and EAX1950PRO/HTDP/256M.

Stylish cooling

The EAX1950PRO series incorporated a new fan sink design that provides effective heat dissipation while serving aesthetics purposes as well. With unique embedded heat pipes not found in competing solutions, and blower fan that guides cool air towards the fins, the EAX1950PRO series lowers temperature by 10°C to deliver powerful yet stable graphics performance.

The smooth contour and elegant curves of the fan sink further make the graphics card series perfect for gamers that demand their system to perform well and look good at the same time.

CrossFire Ready

It supports ATI's CrossFire Technology, which allows multiple GPU to operate simultaneously for enhanced video performance. Superior graphics quality is easily achievable with the EAX1950PRO CrossFire/HTDP/256M and EAX1950PRO/HTDP/256M installed in the same system under CrossFire mode.

HDCP and Windows Vista™ ready

To stay in step with Windows Vista requirements, the EAX1950PRO series features HDCP technology to give users

peace of mind when upgrading their systems to support high-definition digital contents and a wide range of premium graphics applications.

Splendid Video Intelligence Technology

The new EAX1950PRO series supports Splendid Video Intelligence Technology, an exclusive feature found only on ASUS solutions. With Splendid, images enabled by ASUS graphics cards are fine tuned to deliver vibrant visual representations in conditions most favorable to the human eye.

Splendid detects activation and usage of video applications and automatically optimizes image quality for the best visual results, and further provides five modes (Standard, Game, Theater, Scenery and Night) and three skin tone options for various video



▲ New fan design with embedded heatpipes and blower fan.

applications. Splendid works on top of ATI's Avivo? technology to offer sharp decoded video.

requirements, the EAX1950PRO series features HDCP technology to give users peace of mind when upgrading their systems to support high-definition digital contents and a wide range of premium graphics applications.

Model	EAX1950PRO CrossFire/HTDP/256M	EAX1950PRO/HTDP/256M
Graphics Engine	RADEON X1950PRO	RADEON X1950PRO
Video Memory	256MB DDR3	256MB DDR3
Engine Clock	581MHz	581MHz
Memory Clock	1.4GHz (702MHz DDR3)	1.4GHz (702MHz DDR3)
Memory Interface	256-bit	256-bit
Max. Resolution	2048 X 1536	2048 X 1536
Bus Standard	PCI Express X16	PCI Express X16
VGA Output	YES, via DVI to VGA Adapter	YES, via DVI to VGA Adapter
HDTV Output	YES, S-Video to HDTV Out	YES, S-Video to HDTV Out
TV Output	YES, S-Video to Composite	YES, S-Video to Composite
DVI Output	DVI-I	DVI-I
Dual DVI Output	YES	YES
HDCP Compliant	YES	YES
Adaptor/Cable Bundled	DVI to VGA adapter	DVI to VGA adapter
	HDTV-out cable	HDTV-Out Cable
	Power Cable	Power Cable
	CrossFire Interconnector * 2	
Software Bundled	ASUS Utilities & Driver	ASUS Utilities & Driver

VITAL INFO

Platforms

Reviewed on PS2

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R399

Developer

EA Canada

Publisher

EA Sports

Supplier

EA South Africa [011] 516-8300

Genre

Sport

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Online: No

Controllers: 1-4 with multitap

Players: 1-4

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CRICKET 07

CRICKET, A THINKING MAN'S game that poses a number of tough questions to its participants. Questions about what kind of ball one should bowl next, how attacking one should bat, and what fielding positions one should place. Enter EA Sports' *Cricket 07*, a game so poor that the only question it musters is the soul-searching one of "Why on earth did I ever buy this game?"

Suitably released to coincide with England's tour of Australia, the game proves to be as much of a non-event as the recent Ashes series. Last year's predecessor, *Cricket 06*, was a pitiful effort providing a diminutive and dull challenge. This year's attempt is a disgrace and barring a few sorry changes, imperceptible to last year's title. Doesn't sound good, does it? The truth is that despite the fanfare, aesthetics, and licensing synonymous with the EA brand, the actual game is about as much fun as facing a Brett Lee bouncer naked and armed with a wooden spoon. Yes, a few strange souls will get a kick out of it, but for most, it signals an unattractive proposition.

With respect to EA, there are a huge number of modes and tournaments to partake in, including a number of leagues, test matches, one-day competitions, the ever-popular Twenty20, the Ashes and the World Cup in the West Indies. There's one glaring question that EA faces with such a barrage of options: what is the point when the gameplay is so appalling?

The main focus of the game, no surprises here, consists of batting and bowling. Bowling comprises having to select from a number of deliveries and then pitching the ball with desired line and length. This is as dull as it sounds. Batting is not much better, but has been slightly altered since last year with the addition of the 'century stick'. Simply put, all that has changed is that the right-analogue stick is now used to play shots instead of the variety of button selections employed in the past. There is no doubt that this makes batting a far more intuitive affair, but it's hardly a great leap of imagination especially when the batting gameplay itself is still so moribund. Like last year, simply launching the ball over the inner-circle fielders and into a gap works again and again and again. Not only is this mind-numbingly boring, but completely unrealistic, offering no real difference in batting approach between a 5-day game



and a 20-over match. This lifelessness makes the title's only new feature, the Ashes Challenge, a total non-event. The 'challenge' places the player within the 2005 Ashes series trying to replicate a number of scenarios. It's a great idea but the game simply isn't strong enough to make it a sustainable feature. In fact, it fails spectacularly, much like a Kevin Pietersen hairstyle. The Ashes videos that are unlocked are great though, but somehow we feel a few decent videos don't warrant *Cricket 07*'s price tag.

There is very little to excite the cricket-title veteran and even less for the novice. No tutorial is available to introduce the newbie to a fairly complex sport. All good titles immerse the player within the game, and if *Cricket 07* can't even explain the intricacies of the game to its users, is there any wonder that the game as a whole is so shoddy?

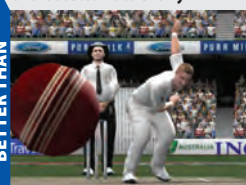
So, where to next for EA's *Cricket* series? After all, when innings after innings is as bad as this, it's worthwhile to either give up or totally reinvent one's game. Whatever the case, a couple of EA head-honcho skulls will roll after this, frankly, dismal effort. **NAG**

BOTTOM LINE

Like a number 11 batsman at the crease, many flashy moves but no real substance. Although licensed with authentic players and competitions, EA Sport's *Cricket 07* lacks good entertaining gameplay and is a title that should be avoided.

50/100

Cricket 05... fractionally



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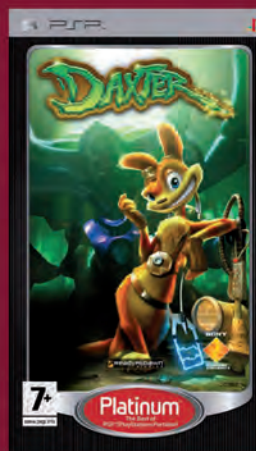
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VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R299

Developer

Techland

Publisher

Ubisoft

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

CPU: 2.2GHz

Video: GeForce 6600/Radeon 9800 or better

RAM: 512MB RAM

HDD: 2GB

CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Players: 1 - 32

Internet: Not required, available

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CALL OF JUAREZ

IMAGINE BEING HATED BY almost everyone in your hometown, leaving in search of a lost Aztec treasure, and then coming back empty-handed. What would your first impulse be? Go home to mommy for a hug? What would you do if, on top of that, you got home to find your family dead and a crazy-ass preacher, who thinks you are responsible for their deaths, after you? This is the beginning of a story that, as you play, will unravel with Billy, the drifter who lost his family, trying to escape and avoid the preacher, and you also get to switch roles and play as Billy's pursuer, the crazy-ass preacher named Ray. You will need to unravel the mystery behind the call of Juarez and how Billy and Ray are linked to the gold and each other.

A classic western shooter, you will get to experience what the Wild West was like with classic moments like quick draw duels, horse riding, chases and more. As Billy, you can use a whip to scale buildings and swing across canyons, while you can use your two six-shooters to take out entire armies of enemies as Ray. You will notice that Billy will focus mainly on stealth, using very few

weapons throughout the game, while Ray is all about the guns with a shoot-first-and-ask-questions-later attitude. There is a bullet-time mode as well, which comes in quite handy during major shoot-outs. Another fun aspect of the game is the multiplayer in which you can play a classic Cowboys and Indians type game, either robbing a bank or getting involved in a shootout.

The developer of the game, Techland, has really developed a great game, and it is clear that it is trying to better itself in all aspects. The scenery is absolutely breathtaking at times, and this can be experienced at lower resolutions and settings as well. The physics, compared to the previous game, *Chrome*, are now very realistic. There are still a few problems with the sprites, but this might be because the developer was concentrating on getting the game to look good at lower resolutions as well as higher ones.

Call of Juarez is a definite must-have for any western fanatic, and it will leave you feeling like you have just stepped into a Clint Eastwood movie. **NAG**

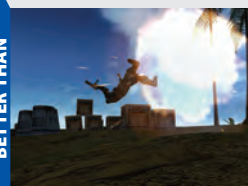
BOTTOM LINE

A good western game in the style of the old movies of the same genre.

84/100

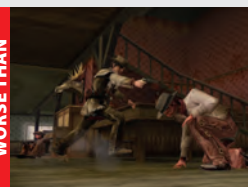
Chrome

BETTER THAN



Gun

WORSE THAN



VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R599

Developer

SEGA

Publisher

Sega Europe

Supplier

WWE [011] 462-0150

Genre

MMORPG

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Online: Yes

Players: 1

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BOTTOM LINE

It's a hack and slash MMORPG, on console. Not bad, but could be better.

70/100

Phantasy Star [online]



World of Warcraft [PC]



PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

THE SEQUEL TO *PHANTASY Star Online*, *Universe* is just more of the same. The game is split two ways: an offline single-player mode that presents itself as an anime (complete with 'In the Next Episode' trailers when you finish a chapter); and an online MMORPG mode complete with monthly fee. The single-player component is decent enough, with reasonable voice acting. As a basic hack and slash RPG, you progress through the plot and gain experience, weapons, items, and companions who'll go with you on missions. *PSU* is not a game that should be bought exclusively for its single-player, however, as it is clear that most of the developer's efforts went into the online part. Once you've subscribed to the \$10 monthly fee (from within the game itself), you can go online. Much like *Guild Wars*, each Hub area has several servers and you can only see players that are on the same server (district) as you, though you can swap between them at will. Once you party up and engage in a mission, you are thrust into an instantiated zone with your party members. Communication is easy thanks to the microphone/headset VoIP functionality of Live, although you can plug in a USB keyboard to type more conventionally. Missions are straightforward, and the combat is engaging with its real-time nature (you have weak and hard attack buttons, as well as assignable special attacks). The straightforward nature of the online part makes it appealing, and playing a MMORPG from the comfort of your console is

liberating. However, the limited nature of the game, along with bland missions and blander visuals, may displease those looking for something more involved. The 360 version is separate from the PS2/PC versions, which actually play together on the same servers. This exclusion is presumably due to 360 owners having native voice-chat. **NAG**

WARNING: Phantasy Star Universe uses a separate fee for its monthly fee in addition to your regular Live Gold membership. It charges you a re-occurring \$10 a month, that can only be cancelled by calling Xbox Support at 0800 991 550.

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE (PS2)

RRP: R499

The PlayStation 2 version of *PSU* is literally identical to the 360 (and PC) versions, with a few exceptions such as slowdowns. You must create your account online from a specific Website, and you will need the PS2 broadband adapter (unless you have a PS2 Slim, which has it built-in). The visuals are exactly the same as the 360 version. The PS2 version actually plays on the same servers as the PC version.

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R465

Developer

Raven Software

Publisher

Activision

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

13+

Specifications

Online: Yes

Players: 1-4

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BOTTOM LINE

A great button basher to play with friends, but non-Marvel fans won't be as charmed by it.

75/100

X-Men Legends

BETTER THAN



X-Men Legends II

WORSE THAN



MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

YES, IT'S ANOTHER SUPERHERO game; something that gamers are generally weary of. There have been games from this group that were stunning, but each was followed by three of four mediocre titles – the unfortunate effect of being in the license department. Still, companies wouldn't be developing licensed games if the people who love the characters involved didn't want to play them in a game. All it requires is to find the right type of game to go with the characters. In the case of the Marvel heroes, veteran developer Raven has found a perfect fit: the age-old dungeon crawler. In essence, *Ultimate Alliance* and predecessors like *X-Men: Legends* are nothing more than a glorified *Gauntlet*. However, if memory serves us, *Gauntlet* was super addictive, so it's no accident that *Ultimate Alliance* is too. Nevertheless, you might not like it. Apart from enjoying a good, if tedious, stroll through enemy environments and gaining XP from beating hapless minions, *Ultimate Alliance* is also a dream for Marvel fan. That hook completely dissolves if you don't have some form of geek-out factor for comics. However, if you have even a mild interest, say in only Spider-Man or the Fantastic Four, they are there and ready for action. S.H.I.E.L.D. calls for help when Dr. Doom attacks one of its

ships and Spidey, Wolverine, Thor and Captain America arrive to help. In total there are 25 characters to choose from (some require unlocking), and the four team members can be changed around at any save point. In addition to allowing fans to build their own fantasy Marvel squads, it also lets players experience the range of abilities the characters offer. Some fly, some are fast, and some have devastating close attacks and some equally devastating ranged attacks. Being a button masher, *Ultimate Alliance* only has one jump, one grapple and two attacks, but holding one trigger opens up four special attacks unique to each character. These are unlocked and improved with the XP gained – a nice touch here is that even unused characters upgrade while you play, though slightly behind characters in play.

Against the superheroes are many super-villains, making *Ultimate Alliance* a reasonable Who's Who of the Marvel universe. It's also visually pleasing and lets up to four players play the game, making it a great multiplayer title. The biggest drawback is that the game can get tedious, and while they are varied, the environments feel constraining. Therefore, it's not perfect, but *Ultimate Alliance* is a lot of fun. **NAG**

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE (PC)

RRP: R285

Score: 70/100

As with most of the recent 360 to PC ports, *Ultimate Alliance* is a 1:1 translation with literally no difference between the two (often right down to the instructions and their 'click the left stick'). The controls suffer slightly for it, and we recommend sticking a wired 360 controller into your USB port if you plan to play it.



VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R499

Developer

Neversoft

Publisher

Activision

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Sports

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Online: Yes

Players: 1-8

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BOTTOM LINE

Best Tony Hawk since Pro Skater 2
- no doubt about it.

89/100

American Wasteland

BETTER THAN



THPS 2

WORSE THAN



TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8

DID YOU LOVE *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* or *3*? Do you feel that *Underground 1* and *2* as well as *American Wasteland* were just too silly and deviated too far from what the point of the series is? Apparently many people were thinking along those lines, because *Project 8* is almost a complete reset of the franchise to a crisper, clean core ideal: skateboarding. No more throwing tomatoes, hitting people with your board, or saving the planet from Godzilla, unleashed by Bam Magera. Nope, *Project 8* is straightforward and to the point, with almost no story whatsoever. Tony's putting together a team of eight skateboarders, and you have to reach the upper rankings by completing events. Content can be unlocked by collecting Tokens, a form of currency that you get from doing tricks near bystanders.

And it's pretty. Visually the series has finally matured with this new iteration. The realistic animations and motion-captured skateboarders all combine into a feast for the eyes. Instead of separate levels, the game world is one large zone that gets more regions added as you progress, letting you make a run from anywhere to anywhere in one smooth ride. Each area, such as the school, skate park, or suburbia, combines the best designs from the previous *Tony Hawk* games into one solid skateboarding experience. The new 'nail the trick' mode lets you create custom kick-flip tricks by using both analogues, while the new slow-mo feature helps you with particularly tricky situations (such as maintaining a long grind or manual). The expected multiplayer and split-screen modes return, along with full Live support for having a session online with friends. The music selection is a bit iffy this time, but you don't have to listen to it. **NAG**



TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8 [PS2]

Score: 68/100

Tony Hawk is looking for the eight best skaters around and you have to work yourself up from being unknown to headlining Project 8. This, as usual, is achieved by completing goals, which may include uncovering gaps, performing specific tricks in certain places, or simply getting a high enough score within the confines of a certain area. Classic goals reminiscent of the old *Pro Skater* titles are also available in each of the different areas, which are progressively unlocked as you increase your ranking. The biggest change to the play dynamic is the 'nail-the-trick' system, where, whilst in the air, you can activate a slow-motion mode where you use the left and right analogue sticks to control your skater's feet, thereby actually performing flip tricks yourself. The graphics are certainly an improvement over the title's predecessors, particularly in the cut-scenes, and the soundtrack is quite extensive. Unfortunately the PS2 version is hampered by long loading times in between areas. Another disappointment is the vastly scaled back character-creation mode. Overall, the play dynamic that made prior titles in the series so enjoyable is still definitely present, but *Project 8* is just competent, not anything new.



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R399

■ Developer

Stormfront Studios

■ Publisher

Vivendi Games

■ Supplier

MiDigital [011] 723-1967

■ Genre

Action

■ Age Restriction

12+

■ Specifications

Online: No

Controllers: 1-2

Players: 1-2

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BOTTOM LINE

There is just no excuse for games like this.

45/100

ERAGON

SLAPPED TOGETHER AND RUSHED out the doors for the sake of more money, *Eragon* for the PS2 is exactly what you'd expect. An on-rails, utterly linear brawler with seriously shallow combat and a half-broken two-player mode just isn't what fans of the book (and the few fans of the movie) want. You have a limited set of combination attacks, and your magic is limited to either shooting an exploding arrow or 'force-pushing' something into a pre-defined place. The game follows the rough plot and doesn't try to innovate or add anything into the mix. When you reach the fly-on-your-dragon parts, you're treated to flying in a predefined circle, shooting things and dodging things, until you shoot and dodge enough things for the next level to load. Invigorating!

There are no clips from the movie in the game. The story is told via artwork (which on its own is rather stylish) and dubious voice acting. It is unfortunate, since readers of the book will attest that there is ample subject matter to develop a truly involved game. Instead, Vivendi was content to slap the basics together, follow some guidelines set by the *Lord of the Rings* games of the same nature, and then shove the product into gamers' hands. We don't recommend attempting to play *Eragon* by yourself either, because without a friend to at least share the bitter taste it quickly becomes unbearable. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

Reviewed on PS2

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	Wii

■ Suggested Retail Price

R299

■ Developer

Amaze Entertainment

■ Publisher

Vivendi Games

■ Supplier

MiDigital [011] 723-1967

■ Genre

Action RPG

■ Age Restriction

12+

■ Specifications

Online: No

Wireless: No

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BOTTOM LINE

This game reaffirms why we never liked movie-license tie-ins in the first place.

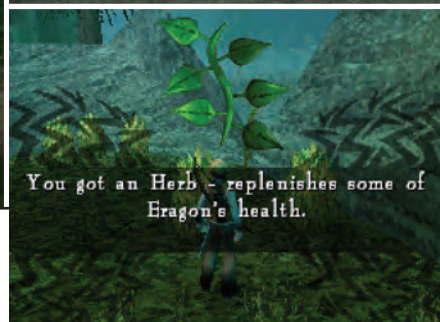
48/100

ERAGON

SURPRISINGLY, *ERAGON* FOR THE Nintendo DS (based more on the movie than the book, of course) is not a bad little button-masher. It regularly doles out new skills, keeping the game almost RPG-like for the sake of longevity. The combat system is simple (along with the AI, which is content to just stand there and take punishment), borrowing a few ideas here and there from the likes of *Zelda* in terms of progression. The visuals teeter between nice and frame-dropping ugly, which isn't really a good thing. It's very easy to feel that the developers could surely have done a much better job had they actually cared. Movie-license games tend to be bad, and there simply is

no reason for them to be other than to make a quick buck off a rushed product.

The game incorporates a modicum of touch-screen functionality, mostly in the form of having to draw shapes to heal yourself. The climax of the game, riding on your dragon Saphira, is a true letdown and ends up being very frustrating. As was with the movie (and as is with the DS game), *Eragon* is a story best read, not watched or played. Young ones might be enticed into purchasing *Eragon* for their DSs, but should only do so once they are sure they want it (try to find a friend who has it, and borrow it). **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R375

■ Developer

Radical Entertainment

■ Publisher

Sierra

■ Supplier

Midigital [011] 723-1967

■ Genre

Freeform

■ Age Restriction

18+

■ Specifications

Online: No

Players: 1

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BOTTOM LINE

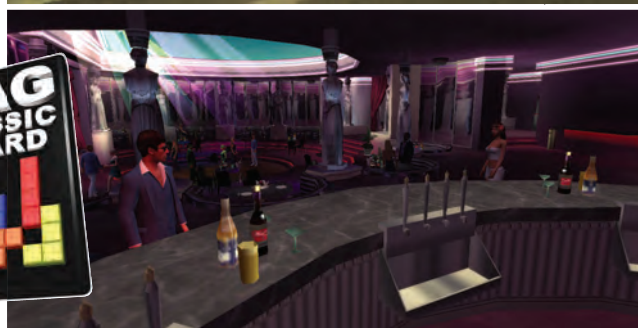
A lot better than you'd expect. GTA fans should give it a serious look.

85/100

SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS

IT APPEARS THAT THE freeform/sandbox genre has become largely popular for crime games and old movie licenses. *Scarface*, the game based on the infamous gangster movie starring Al Pacino, is the latest in this slightly crowded group. If the developers of the game simply relied on an open world and Tony's vast lexicon of expletives, there wouldn't be much to *Scarface*. However, underneath what is a good-looking and nicely polished freeform game is a tight set of rules based around Tony bringing his empire back to its former glory by dealing in drugs, killing rivals, and making the all-important money. The main aim is to restore Tony's reputation, business, and cash reserves, which in turn can be used to buy cars, houses, and other material possessions.

All of this also works well in practice, because the game itself is nicely crafted. The combat system is great and the driving arguably the best in a freeform game yet. Things can be a bit formulaic, but the more rigid structure is a breath of fresh air and shows how the genre can be tweaked and changed. The story also constrains your actions to an extent, but that helps keep the plot relevant and paced. Still, the game is 90% in the player's hands to do what they please. The voice actor filling in for Pacino (who is really too old to reprise the role) is spot on, and the game is as gritty and vulgar as the movie. Overall, *Scarface* delivers for fans of both the film and the genre. It's not the best, but at least it won't take any attitude. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	Wii

■ Suggested Retail Price

R399

■ Developer

FarSight Studios

■ Publisher

Vivendi Games

■ Supplier

Midigital [011] 723-1967

■ Genre

Strategy

■ Age Restriction

18+

■ Specifications

Memory: 300KB

Online: No

Wireless: Yes

Game sharing: No

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BOTTOM LINE

Money. Power. Respect. Portable.

75/100

SCARFACE

NOW THIS IS A pleasant surprise. *Scarface* on the PS2 is very GTA-like and action centric, something that wouldn't have worked as well on the limited control set of the PSP. Instead, the portable version of *Scarface* is a terrific turn-based strategy. The primary mode of the game has you playing scenarios based on various scenes from the movie, which actually play before the scenario starts (and includes a helpful reference to exactly where in the movie, to the second, said scene plays). Once in the scenario, there are several modes to a turn. First is the Buy mode, where you purchase drug-producing labs and store houses. You can also hire more Crew and Pushers, as well as Power Moves. Power Moves are what make *Scarface* so involved, and come in three flavours: Combat, Law, and Drugs. You can't choose

what Power Move to buy - it's very much like a random deck of cards. Power Moves are played in their relevant sections: Combat during Combat, Drugs during the Drug phase, etc. The Drug phase involves setting regions where you sell your accumulated drugs, while the Combat phase is for attacking or defending territory. You fight against various gangs for control of regions and for drugs. You can't see what moves your opponents are going to make, which keeps things rather tense - it's very easy to gang up and take a territory, only to have your opponent take your undefended territory in the same move. The multiplayer allows up to four players to duke it out. Sadly, there is no Game Share. If you're looking for an involved strategy game (and don't mind the swearing or subject matter), *Scarface* is an amiable title. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R299

■ Developer

Piranha Bytes

■ Publisher

JoWood

■ Supplier

Apex Interactive [021] 347-8884

■ Genre

RPG

■ Age Restriction

16+

■ Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 2GHz

Video: 128MB

RAM: 512MB (2GB recommended)

HDD: 4.6GB

CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Internet: Not required

Players: 1

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BOTTOM LINE

Perhaps in a few years, once fully patched, *Gothic 3* will attain its rightful place.

64/100

GOTHIC 3

THE PREVIOUS TWO *GOTHIC* games were stunning examples of ingenuity and a brazen disregard for convention. As a result, *Gothic 1* and *2* were top-notch RPGs with ample style, attitude, and rather impressive AI that could even go for a pee. *Gothic 3* is nothing like that.

Gothic 3 attempts an almost *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* style experience - very open-ended with a heavy emphasis on questing, killing monsters, and combat. In this regard, it does a damn good job, were it not for the bugs (you'll be hearing about the bugs a lot). The quests are interesting and the plot contrived, but forgivable. If you could play *Gothic 3* without experiencing a single bug, you'll have a good time. Unfortunately, *Gothic 3* has more than enough bugs to keep it rolling in patches for the next few years. Some bugs corrupt your savegames; others make it impossible to kill even the easiest creatures. One will teleport you into the future, breaking all your quests and making it impossible to finish the game. The game is a system hog, and you ideally need at least 2GB of RAM for it. Glimmers of what made its predecessors so great do make a return: NPCs won't take kindly to you walking into their homes, and creatures such as wolves tend to hunt in packs. Nevertheless, once you've collected ten wolf skins, killed 12 orcs, and retrieved the fire chalice, all the while trying to defend your escort from himself (they can actually kill themselves with stupidity), you wonder if there isn't more to life. Fans of the series may take to the game a bit more than newcomers may, and will be rewarded for it with a deep conventional RPG experience. Newcomers might find themselves frustrated that (pre-patch) a single boar in the wild is a guaranteed death sentence. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	GBA

■ Suggested Retail Price

R341

■ Developer

Krome Studios

■ Publisher

Sierra

■ Supplier

MiDigital [011] 723-1967

■ Genre

Platformer

■ Age Restriction

7+

■ Specifications

Multiplayer: No

Game share: No

Players: 1

THE LEGEND OF SPYRO: A NEW BEGINNING

BACK IN 1995, THE game *You Don't Know Jack* combined wry sarcasm and Trivial Pursuit-style questions into a fun family experience long before *Weakest Link*.

Buzz! came to light as a music-centric quiz-show for the PS2 complete with Buzzer peripherals that were more plastic than peripheral really - they felt cheap and un-needed. The gamepad would have worked fine, and cost less.

Sony decided to sign up the jaw-flapping and overly annoying host of Buzz! again, along with two-dimensional assistant Rose for a new show format. This time around, the questions range across all topics and players now have more chances to steal points from each other. This is pretty indicative of the game's major failing: it doesn't work well as a standalone trivia 'quiz show' style game, so Sony has to resort

to typical band aids to keep players interested, such as Pass The Bomb and the new Hitman round-type.

The execution of Buzz! The BIG Quiz is just as unforgivably cynical and lacklustre as the first Buzz was. The questions range from impossibly hard and esoteric, right down to downright kindergarten-level queries.

At the end of the day, the only people who could truly enjoy Buzz! The BIG Quiz are those who either don't expect quality from their entertainment, or simply don't know any better. This game could have been done better, much better, with little effort.

But if the family is over and you need to try and convince people that the PlayStation 2 is for 'everyone', whip this out and try to have some fun. **NAG**



BOTTOM LINE

It's fun and kids might dig it, but not really worth the effort.

69/100

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

Reviewed on PC

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R279

■ Developer

Ubisoft

■ Publisher

Ubisoft

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

■ Genre

Stealth

■ Age Restriction

18+

■ Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 3GHz or Athlon 3000+
Video: DirectX9.0c-compliant, Shader 3.0-enabled 128MB graphics card (256MB recommended)

RAM: 1GB RAM**HDD:** 8GB**CD/DVD:** 4x DVD-ROM**Players:** 1**Internet:** Not required

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BOTTOM LINE

It demands a powerful rig, but otherwise it's still a PC-perfect *Splinter Cell* title.

85/100



SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT

SPLINTER CELL WITHOUT A good PC release wouldn't be *Splinter Cell*. *Double Agent* is a port of the 360 version, which, fortunately, doesn't seem to be missing any of the content or the graphical fidelity. Once again, players are cast into the role of international high-tech ninja spy, Sam Fisher. The difference this time around is that Fisher is working as a double agent, entrenched in a terrorist group called John Brown's Army, or the JBA. Players are faced with the task of balancing the trust of the terrorist group against Sam Fisher's original employers, the NSA. Obviously, the two organisations tend to give you directly conflicting mission objectives, and the storyline allows you to be a very bad man and do very bad things. Red Storm wanted to place emphasis on the player's actions being determined by the player, rather than

forcing altruism out of the player as games of this type usually do.

The aspect of choice isn't just for show, as *Double Agent* features a branching storyline, where certain approaches will see separate missions and situations. Thankfully, the story is also easier to follow, with more identifiable characters and a much simpler structure. Because the PC version is practically a clean platform translation of the Xbox 360 version, *Double Agent* does suffer from high system requirements. The keyboard and mouse combo is as perfect as any *Splinter Cell* game has ever been, and the control layout, drawing from *Chaos Theory*'s contextual action system, makes controlling Sam Fisher as logical and simple as it has always been. While quite dissimilar from its predecessors, *Double Agent* is an excellent action stealth game. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R225

■ Developer

Monolith

■ Publisher

Vivendi

■ Supplier

MiDigital [011] 723-1967

■ Genre

Action

■ Age Restriction

18+

■ Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 1.7GHz or equivalent
Video: 64 MB GeForce 4 Ti or Radeon® 9000 graphics card

RAM: 512MB**HDD:** 5.0GB**CD/DVD:** DirectX 9.0c**Internet:** Not Required**Players:** 1

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BOTTOM LINE

A good expansion for a great game.

80/100

F.E.A.R.: EXTRACTION POINT

THE FIRST EXPANSION TO *F.E.A.R.*, *Extraction Point*, starts where *F.E.A.R.* ended. The helicopter you were in crashed, leaving you and your team stranded in the city. To complement the story, Monolith has added a few new enemies and weapons. These include a chaingun, automatic sentry turrets, and probably the most fun laser rifle we ever had to play with in a game. The new weapons are awarded to you somewhat midway through the campaign. Although the campaign game is by no means less engaging or enjoyable than the original *F.E.A.R.*, it would have been nice to see the new weapons earlier on in a strictly single-player campaign.

The new enemies fit in well in the *F.E.A.R.* universe. None of them seems out of place, and one of them, in particular, is used to a very creepy effect. The graphics have not been improved or tweaked, but as *F.E.A.R.* wasn't a terribly ugly game to begin with, this shouldn't bother you one bit. However, criticisms about the first game's constant office and service passage décor have been noted, and the expansion will take players through a few new environments. *Extraction Point* also manages to keep the pacing and gameplay of the original *F.E.A.R.* intact, with a healthy number of set-piece scenes and challenging situations. It remains to be seen if the new weapons will surface in a *F.E.A.R. Combat* update, so fans of *F.E.A.R.* multiplayer will need *Extraction Point* to get the new hardware. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

Reviewed on PS2

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R375

■ Developer

4J Studios

■ Publisher

Bethesda

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

■ Genre

Action

■ Age Restriction

TBA

■ Specifications

Online: Yes

Players: 1-2

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BOTTOM LINE

Tough controls and a lack of variety stunt this action game.

69/100



STAR TREK: ENCOUNTERS

SPACE... THE FINAL FRONTIER. We'll never get tired of writing that. It's *Star Trek*; a series made immortal by its fans, because it lets them get on a star ship and zip across a huge universe. Real space is not nearly that exciting. Alas, neither is *Star Trek: Encounters*. The PS2 version forms part of Bethesda's large *Star Trek* push, culminating in big brother *Legacy*. To put *Legacy* on the PS2 would have been damaging, since one of its charms is its size and graphics – which the PS2 would struggle to handle. Instead, it got *Encounters*, a more arcade-action game where you pilot one of the dozens of ships from the *ST* universe. It also spans the whole history of the series

and comes complete with a William Shatner narration.

Unfortunately, there isn't anything of a story, instead just missions to complete. Most involve action, which would have been very satisfying if the control scheme didn't demand a crab posture of the dual-shock. Trying to target a ship, lock on, and shoot a bevy of photon torpedoes in the heat of battle often left our hands cramped. This sucks the enjoyment out of the game a bit, and even when you master combat, it's never enjoyable enough to forget that there isn't much more to *Encounters*. It's good enough to be a great budget buy, though. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

Reviewed on PSP

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	Wii

■ Suggested Retail Price

R449

■ Developer

Quicksilver

■ Publisher

Ubisoft | Bethesda Softworks

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

■ Genre

Action Simulation

■ Age Restriction

12+

■ Specifications

Memory: 288KB

Wireless: Yes

Online: No

Game Sharing: No

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BOTTOM LINE

Star Trek: Tactical Assault is a decent action simulation for the PSP. It requires a little tactical strategy here and there, but could have been much better.

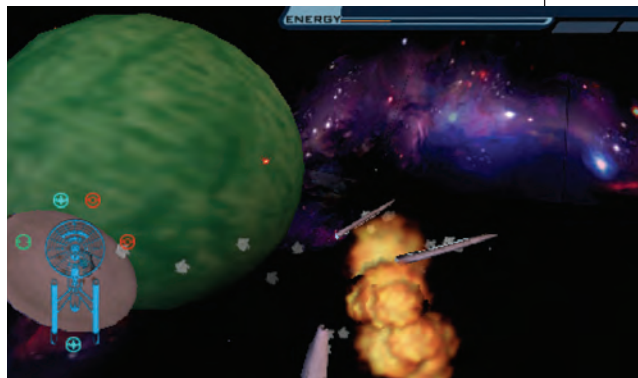
67/100

STAR TREK: TACTICAL ASSAULT

STAR TREK: TACTICAL ASSAULT takes place during the Kirk era and involves captaining various Klingon and Federation ships, upgrading crew members, and destroying enemy ships. The story feels like a condensed set of episodes from the original series, but never allows the player to boldly go anywhere beyond a limited set of locations and objectives. The single-player game plays out over two different campaigns, one Federation and one Klingon (the Klingon campaign is locked until you finish the Federation one). As you progress, you'll receive more prestigious ships to captain as well as unlock a number of unique ships (not available in the single-player game) that can be accessed in the multiplayer and skirmish modes. The successful completion of missions also rewards the player with crew upgrade points that can be used to improve the performance of their ships, such as the faster recharging of weapons or improving manoeuvrability.

Battling single or multiple enemy vessels is the meat of the game and requires the precise control and placement of your ship in battle. Timing is also important, as you will need to wear down the enemy's shields before dealing any damage to the actual ship. This results in a lot of space ballet and the careful timing of your shots to wear away specific shield facings. Unfortunately this is all there is to it, and the game soon becomes repetitive with the lure of getting bigger and better ships as you play through the game being the only solid reason to continue. The sound and graphics are functional, but not remarkable, and while everything works well together, you can't help but feel that a little more control over where you can go and your ship's systems would have made the

whole game that much better. *Tactical Assault* is a solid *Star Trek* experience and will find favour with fans of the series. Just don't expect too much from it, and you won't be disappointed. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R450

■ Developer

Microsoft ACES Studios

■ Publisher

Comtek 0860 600-557

■ Supplier

Microsoft

■ Genre

Simulation

■ Age Restriction

3+

■ Specifications

CPU: 1.0GHz

Video: 32MB DirectX 9 compatible

RAM: 256MB (XP), 512MB (Vista)

HDD: 14GB

CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Players: 1

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BOTTOM LINE

Improved scenery detail, 24,000 airports, new adventure based gameplay and realism make this a winner.

85/100

MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X

WHY FLIGHT SIMULATOR X? That's obvious: this is the 10th instalment of Microsoft's very successful *Flight Simulator* series. What makes *Flight Simulator* different to many others is its ability to mimic real life with sobering accuracy.

The installation requires 14GB of hard drive space. The simulation launches with a simple splash screen inscribed with 'Microsoft Flight Simulator X' - nothing spectacular but it manages a statement. Something new: product activation just like XP and Vista.

The game now has theme music playing while you navigating the menu. Thankfully, this can be changed or turned off, and we're sure someone will figure out how to replace it with your favourite James Brown number. The menu layout has changed from the previous version. Many of the keyboard controls have also been 'remapped' - a problem for those who prefer consistency. A big improvement over previous releases is the ability to navigate the menu during a flight without having to pause. 'V' on the keyboard will take in-game screenshots to share with mates.

Improvements to the pilot logbook include a new rewards system where medals and accolades are earned from adventure-based gameplay. The logbook differentiates between the different aircraft, and logs hours for each type.

Several new aircraft, including the Airbus, fill the virtual hanger. MS claims it's like flying the real thing. The detail of the aircraft is



an improvement over the previous release, but system simulation is still lacking.

Cockpit instrumentation shows no big changes, but there are some improvements - head latency effects in the virtual cockpit being one.

Massive advancements in scenery quality have been made. Cloud textures are realistic. Hundreds of airfields worldwide have been modelled, cars move along highways, and animals roam the fields.

The AI air traffic and control have been improved. Online gameplay shows Microsoft's commitment to community-based gaming. The adventure-based gameplay is very captivating. You can choose from several interactive training or search and rescue missions that keep you busy for hours.

The minimum system specifications to run FSX will not satisfy flight simmers. Tests conducted on a minimum spec PC proved unsatisfactory. Frametimes were nowhere and the trade-off between smoothness and detail was not acceptable.

FSX is much better than *Flight Simulator 2004*. In fact, Microsoft *Flight Simulator X* has the potential to be the best simulation to date. If you have ever wondered what it's like to fly, FSX will answer that question. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R251

■ Developer

Bethesda Softworks

■ Publisher

Ubisoft

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

■ Genre

RPG

■ Age Restriction

16+

■ Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 3.0GHz

Video: 128MB Graphics Card

RAM: 512MB

HDD: 4.6GB

CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Internet: Not required

Players: 1

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BOTTOM LINE

Oblivion fans won't want to miss this bundle.

79/100

OBLIVION - KNIGHTS OF THE NINE

WHEN YOU PURCHASE *KNIGHTS of the Nine* (on retail DVD, instead of from www.obliviondownloads.com), you actually get all the previous content add-ons with it for free - a good deal no matter which way you look at it. Spell Tomes adds in some wondrous and powerful magic spells, gained from finding and reading special books. The Vile Lair (Deepscorn Hollow) is a property for evil characters and even includes a prisoner for sating vampire blood lust. Mehrunes' Razor is a difficult dungeon that contains a powerful weapon, while The Thieves Den is a lost pirate ship property for stealth characters. For magic-centric characters, both the Wizard's Tower and the Orrery are impressive properties with various benefits (such as an alchemy cove that boosts your alchemy while you're standing in it). Even the Horse Armour Pack is included, which gets you

armour for your horse - the first one is free.

Much more detailed and involved, *Knights of the Nine* is a sprawling quest (hint: it starts in Anvil, outside the church) involving a banished king who has returned from Oblivion to take vengeance. You, as the self-proclaimed champion of Cyrodiil, must heed the call of the gods, reclaim several powerful Divine Crusader artefacts, and then restore the Knights of the Nine. The entire (roughly 15 to 25 hours of playing with an existing character) quest is masterfully crafted and shines in comparison to the regular quests. The items you gain from assembling the Nine are rather exceptional, and well worth the effort (for good characters). Once you complete the quest, you are revered throughout the world and even have access to your own personal knight army along with a base of operations, the Nine Priory. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R270

Developer

SEGA

Publisher

Ubisoft

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Puzzle

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Memory: 224KB

Wireless: Yes

Online: No

Players: No

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BOTTOM LINE

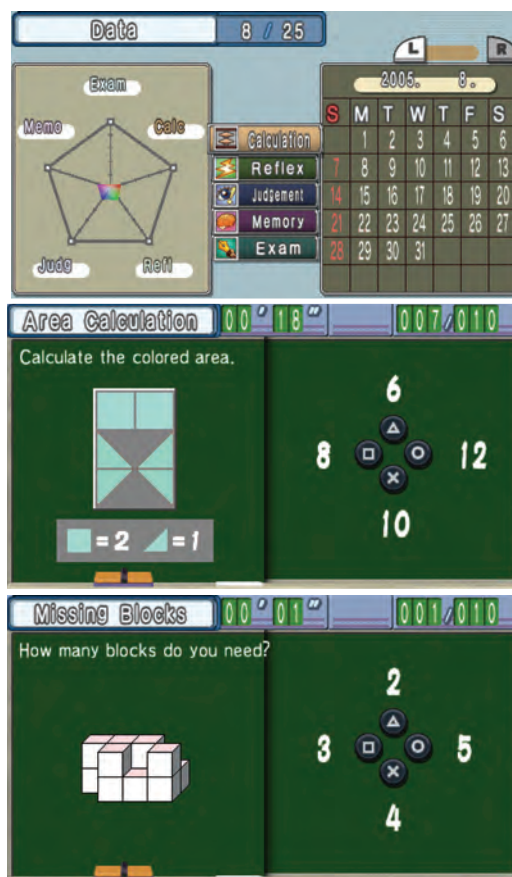
It's fun and helps you stay sharp.

78/100

MIND QUIZ: EXERCISE YOUR BRAIN

YOU REMEMBER DR RYUTA Kawashima, right? He's that handsome fella who wrote those books about your brain's age, and how you can do various exercises to keep your brain young. He appeared in the Nintendo DS game *Brain Age* as a polygonal happy face, ever eager to give you some advice. *Mind Quiz* is essentially the PSP's answer to *Brain Age*, and surprisingly it's as good as or even better than the DS version. Unfortunately, Kawashima doesn't appear in this version, so you'll have to please yourself with various anime-inspired women who are rooting for you.

The game is a series of calculation, reflex, judgement, and memory exercises that are designed to rejuvenate your brain (based on science). As you progress from day to day, it tracks your Brain Age and lets you evaluate how you're doing. The exercises are varied and fun, although some of them can be downright evil (such as expecting you to rapidly calculate a grid of 20 or so numbers). Each exercise can be played at a variety of difficulty levels, ranging from Very Easy to Hurt Me Plenty. When you complete one, you can choose another to unlock until you have over 50 mini-games you can play. There is a Challenge Mode that involves travelling from location to location, with each country containing its own unique set of exercises. Multiplayer comes in the form of an ad-hoc battle mode, where two players are given the same set of questions and the first to complete them (without making too many mistakes) wins. PSP owners who have looked at *Brain Age* on the DS with envy can now get their own back with an admittedly superior incarnation. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R199

Developer

Ubisoft

Publisher

Ubisoft

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Strategy

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 1.5GHz

Video: 64MB Graphics Card

RAM: 512MB RAM

HDD: 2.0GB HDD

CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Internet: Not required, but available

Players: 1-8

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BOTTOM LINE

A few changes and new features, but not really enough.

62/100

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V: HAMMERS OF FATE

HAMMERS OF FATE is an add-on expansion to *Heroes of Might and Magic V*, and as such requires the original game in order to be played. As expansions go, it is fairly unimpressive. It offers very little (read "nothing, really") new in terms of game dynamics. Caravans can now be created to move creatures from one place to another, and a minor enhancement has been made to recruitment from towns, but this is about the entire extent of gameplay changes. Its main charm lies in the fact that it extends the story line, reflecting how characters have evolved by the end of the original game's campaign. Missions are as long as they were in the original, but mercifully, some aspects of the learning curve have been excised. For instance, players start with two hero armies, and both of these heroes have a few spells to begin with. The graphics remain the *Warcraft III*-like renderings of fantasy characters and beasts, and are generally fairly pleasing. It also appears that animations have been slightly enhanced. Lastly, a random map generator has been added – useful! Other than this, the main enhancements are for multiplayer, with a new faction and a number of maps added. If you enjoyed the story in *Heroes of Might and Magic V*, then you will find its continuation welcome. However, be advised: there is little innovation in this title. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

Reviewed on PSP

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R440

■ Developer

Amaze Entertainment

■ Publisher

LucasArts

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

■ Genre

Action Adventure

■ Age Restriction

3+

■ Specifications

Memory: 128KB

Wireless: Yes

Online: No

Game sharing: No

Players: 1–2

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BOTTOM LINE

Lego and *Star Wars*, now offering rendered plastic studded incarnations of Episodes IV–VI. How could this possibly not be the coolest thing ever?

90/100

LEGO STAR WARS 2:
THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY

EVERYONE LOVES LEGO. EVERYONE loves *Star Wars*. The sequel was inevitable. This time around, players get to play out the original three movies (i.e.; the good ones). The galactic shenanigans blast off, therefore, aboard the Tantive IV as Imperial Troops storm the hatches, and wrap up in the skies above Endor when Death Star Mark II goes boom-boom – 18 missions in all. Like its predecessor, missions are interspersed with comical Lego re-enactments of scenes from the films, replacing dialogue with unintelligible mumbling and big gestures, and reducing dramatic and poignant death sequences to a basic head-falls-off scenario.

The 50 unlockable and playable characters include Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, and Chewbacca, each with their own abilities (grappling hooks, Force powers, double jumps, etc.) which the player must use accordingly to solve puzzles. Once a character is unlocked in Story Mode, its constituent parts become available for the creation of custom characters – a rather amusing new feature in *LSW2*. Fancy a Frankenstitched monstrosity with Greedo's head, Darth Vader's cape, Han's arms and legs, and stormtrooper armour? Your lab awaits.

The gameplay has virtually no learning curve, so it's a straightforward jump-in-and-shoot-stuff-type game. With its immediately engaging, thoroughly addictive, and surprisingly varied gameplay, huge action- and puzzle-packed levels, immense replay value, and full campaign co-op mode, it's an instant classic and an absolute must-have. Each chapter is practically bursting with studs (a sort of Lego currency) to collect and secret goodies to sniff out and



snag, including mini-kits and red bricks that unlock bonus content as well as vehicles. Exclusive to this PSP version is a mini-kit grabbing time-challenge mode for each level, as well as the final levels of Episodes I–III. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R449

■ Developer

Rebellion

■ Publisher

Activision

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

■ Genre

Action

■ Age Restriction

18+

■ Specifications

Memory: 192KB

Wireless: Yes

Online: No

Internet: No

Game sharing: No

Players: 1

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BOTTOM LINE

Overall a very challenging game that some will love and others will hate.

65/100

GUN SHOWDOWN

THIS GAME VISITS THE Wild West, with players assuming the role of Colton White, a young man suddenly plunged into a gunslinger's life. The story mode opens with a series of tutorial tasks, which generally have to do with shooting various animals. First, flying quail must be taken down, which trains Colton in the use of quick draw mode. It's a form of bullet-time that slows down the passage of time, allowing the player to take precise aim at his or her targets. This mode has a limited duration, which can be extended by taking down enemies, and by executing precise shots such as head shots and disarms. Thereafter, the player is tasked with killing some wolves and hunting some more wolves, which illustrate the uses of the various available

guns. Lastly, Colton must save his mentor from a grizzly bear that is trying to savage him. This is a particularly difficult lesson that teaches the player how to lure out an opponent, and just about had us bashing our heads against a wall. Only after all this is the player allowed to embark on his or her new career of shootouts, train riding, and general Wild West mayhem. The game's graphics truly push the envelope as far as the PSP's capabilities go, and both the models and the environments are very well depicted. However, the control interface is rather less gratifying. It is somewhat counter-intuitive, and very, very tricky to get the hang of! Gun Showdown also features a Texas hold'em (poker) mini-game and several wireless multiplayer game modes. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

Reviewed on PS2

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R399

■ Developer

Climax

■ Publisher

Deep Silver

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

■ Genre

Racing/Sport

■ Age Restriction

18+

■ Specifications

Online: No

Controllers: 1-2

Players: 1-2

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BOTTOM LINE

An almost-interesting concept is hampered by dated visuals, bland sound and frustrating controls.

34/100

CRUSTY DEMONS

CRUSTY DEMONS IS A stunt-orientated motorcycle racing game.

The title, in case you're wondering, is derived from a real-life band of touring stunt riders known as the *Crusty Demons*, and who feature as the game's controllable characters. The game offers a number of modes, ranging from free runs through the various nondescript and bland arenas, as well as a time-limited mode in which you have to complete certain goals. Perhaps the game dynamic's biggest shortcoming is the way it handles racing – you'll need to win races in order to unlock new areas, and this is where the control system really shows its lack of class. The bikes are all far too unstable, particularly at high speeds, and you'll have to make it through a race without crashing to even stand a chance at finishing in front. The result of this is that each new race requires numerous frustrating attempts to thoroughly memorise the course before you can actually put it behind you. Stale graphics and uninspiring sound don't do the title any favours either.

Crusty Demons is simply far too flawed a title to merit any recommendation. Everything, from the ridiculous storyline to the over-the-top attempts to make the characters' crashes as violent as possible, feels rather tacky and cheap. Drab environments, stilted animations, and a counter-productive camera mean that the game fails visually, too. Of course, the most significant and crippling problem with *Crusty Demons* is the rehashed, dated game dynamic, and the frustrating control system, which make for an annoying and unfulfilling experience. The concept is good, and the game does show flashes of inspiration here and there, but all the little niggles and



downfalls ultimately add up to making the game thoroughly unplayable. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

Reviewed on PS2

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	Wii

■ Suggested Retail Price

R499

■ Developer

Namco Bandai

■ Publisher

Atari

■ Supplier

WWE [011] 462-0150

■ Genre

Fighting

■ Age Restriction

12+

■ Specifications

Online: No

Controllers: 1-2

Players: 1-2

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BOTTOM LINE

Budokai Tenkaichi 2 is the best DBZ title yet, just about guaranteed to please fans of the franchise.

76/100

DRAGON BALL Z BUDOKAI TENKAICHI 2

THE LATEST IN A long line of *Dragon Ball Z*-based fighting games has arrived, and *Tenkaichi 2* is an offering that's sure to please fans of the TV series. The game offers a number of modes, including standard 1-on-1 combat, tag team matches, three different tournaments (each with its own rules), themed ladder-ranking matches, as well as the 'Adventure' mode, which spans not only the entire *Dragon Ball Z* TV series storyline, but also covers the movie spin-offs and *Dragon Ball GT*. The story mode is by far the bulkiest portion of the game, and it's also where you'll unlock many of the 75 different characters available (if you count their different forms, there's 120) as you fight your way through storylines that will be familiar to fans of the series. The game dynamic is solid, if somewhat reliant on button mashing, and allows you to pull off many of the characters' trademark flurries and massive energy blasts. As far as translating the *Dragon Ball* legacy to a videogame goes, *Tenkaichi 2* can hardly be faulted. The game is packed with characters and moves from the *Dragon Ball* universe, and the game dynamic does well to translate the fast, frenetic, over-the-top combat popularised by the TV series – everything from teleportation, rush combat, and even breakable landscape objects has been captured. In fact, just about every facet of the televised show has been captured here, to some or other degree. Of course, the game isn't a technical combat title, nor does it claim to be *Virtua Fighter*. Nevertheless, for fans of the TV series who are looking for transformations, energy blasts, and a more than faithful roster of characters, you won't find much better than this. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

RRP: \$8.95 (\$35.95 for whole season)

■ Developer

Telltale Games

■ Publisher

Telltale Games

■ Supplier

www.telltalegames.com

■ Genre

Adventure

■ Age Restriction

All

■ Specifications

CPU: 1GHz

Video: 128MB Graphics Card

RAM: 256MB

HDD: 70MB

CD/DVD: N/A

Players: 1

BOTTOM LINE

It lacks complexity, but *Situation Comedy* is still a great adventure game.

85/100

SAM & MAX: SITUATION COMEDY

IT'S VERY TEMPTING to start another *Sam & Max* review with a quote from the game – and there are plenty of them in *Situation Comedy*. The Freelance Police are informed about a talk show hostess who has taken her guest and audience hostage, but to get to her they'll have to prove that they are celebrities.

"Perhaps. In an Internet petition or 'there ought to be a law' kind of way," Sam responded. Nevertheless, the proof, as with any adventure game, is in the doing. *Situation Comedy* has more substance to it than the first game, mainly because most of the time is spent at the TV studio participating in the three weird shows like 'Who's Never Going To Be A Millionaire' (where winning means getting

only one of the impossible answers right), or a sitcom where two cattle ranchers hide their cow from the landlord of their Manhattan apartment. It's slapstick from the start to finish and the puzzles are even more varied and interesting than in the first, even though they are still very simplistic when compared to larger adventure games.

The real issue, just like *Culture Shock*, is that the episodic model makes the games feel short. It won't take more than two or three hours to finish the game, but on the other hand, it's the second game in a month – each setting you back less than R100 (less than R50 is you buy the whole season at once). In our opinion it's well worth the money, and the second episode makes us look forward to the third, due in a month or so. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R449

■ Developer

Rare Ltd

■ Publisher

Microsoft Game Studios

■ Supplier

Midigital [011] 723-1967

■ Genre

Gardening/Gotta Catch 'em All

■ Age Restriction

3+

■ Specifications

Controllers: 1 - 4

Live Online: Partial

Players: 1 - 4

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BOTTOM LINE

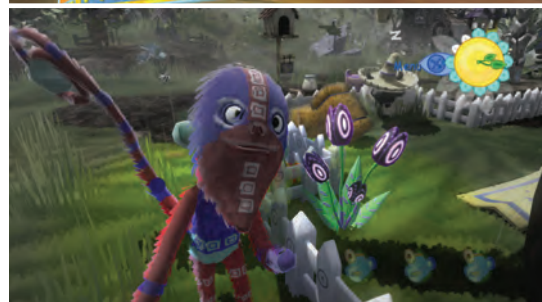
It's simple, addictive, and graphically rather stunning fun.

89/100

VIVA PIÑATA

THEY'RE CUTE AND COLOURFUL; when broken, their candy entrails splash out across the grass. Other piñatas scamper in to eat the candy from the now deceased piñata. Sure, *Viva Piñata* is clearly aimed at children, but sometimes you just have to doubt a little. Starting life back in 2002 as project Your Garden; Rare evolved the idea into the colourful, if slightly bizarre, world of *Viva Piñata*. Microsoft liked the growing popularity surrounding the idea, and produced a Saturday morning CG cartoon with 4Kids Entertainment. The show is terrible. The game, however, is pure gardening bliss.

It's an open-ended sandbox game with no real win/lose scenarios. You can level your garden any time, or just start a new one (carrying over your experience, improved tools, and chocolate money). There are objectives you can reach, such as attracting certain piñatas (around 60 in total, very Pokémon-like), or increasing your garden's value, but no real pressure. You essentially set your own goals. You start with a crappy, small bit of land filled with debris. Once cleared, you start to attract black-and-white piñatas that will turn into colour once you meet their 'Resident Requirements'. Each piñata has its own set of requirements for visiting your garden – for staying as well as for mating. Mating is a silly small mini-game that ends in a cute animation, the mating dance. There are ruffians and sour piñatas that enter your garden and cause a fuss, though sour piñatas can be tamed if you know how. You can buy helpers, seeds to grow plants and trees, and various other tools to help you with your garden. Live support is a slight disappointment: you can only crate up and send items/piñatas to people on your friends list. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R299.99

■ Developer

Appaloosa Interactive

■ Publisher

Majesco Entertainment

■ Supplier

WWE [011] 462-0150

■ Genre

Action

■ Age Restriction

18+

■ Specifications

CPU: 800MHz

Video: GeForce 3 or better

RAM: 128MB RAM

HDD: 400MB

CD/DVD: CD-ROM

Players: 1

Internet: Not required

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BOTTOM LINE

Seen through the eyes of Jaws herself, bite your way through some bloody missions

75/100



JAWS: UNLEASHED

A SOFT UNDERCURRENT PULLS AGAINST you, dragging you back towards the bottomless depths of the ocean. One flick of your tail is all that is needed to propel you forward, with a couple more flicks giving you unbelievable speed. Wait a second; a tail? Humans don't have tails! Ah, this is *Jaws: Unleashed* where you get to play as the shark. While the scenery is beautiful, the biting techniques are incredibly gory. You swim through the reefs of Amity Island taking bites out of fellow fish and unsuspecting humans alike. You wreak havoc by destroying boats, piers, and water parks alike.



Jaws: Unleashed brings back all the excitement from the movies with fun and innovative gameplay and controls. The developer, known for games such as *Ecco the Dolphin*, has really done a superb job in creating this game: the overall design is excellent with some real imagination put into it. There are, of course, dangers and enemies to face such as Captain Brody from the movies as well as killer whales and fishermen.

If you enjoy senseless mayhem with small bits and pieces of storyline spread sparsely throughout, this is the game for you. Just be warned: it is very violent at times. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

Reviewed on PC

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R199

■ Developer

Maxis

■ Publisher

Electronic Arts

■ Supplier

EA South Africa [011] 516-8300

■ Genre

Management/Simulation

■ Age Restriction

3+

■ Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 1.3GHz

Video: 32MB Graphics Card

RAM: 256MB RAM

HDD: 1.5GB HDD

CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Internet: Not required

Players: 1

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BOTTOM LINE

It's *The Sims 2*, with pets.

79/100

THE SIMS 2: PETS

FINALLY, THE PETS HAVE arrived. Kitties and pooches are fully customisable via a new option in Create-A-Family, and can be combined with existing households, although you can trot off to the pet store or use the new Pet Adoption phone service if twiddling with muzzle angles and paw sizes isn't really your thing. There's an impressive array of breeds to choose from, including exotic hybrids like Puggles and Labradoodles, while players can also create their own motley monstrosities with Frankensteinian abandon. There are also low-maintenance caged critters, including the guinea piggy 'womrats', and a modest assortment of birds.

All pets require a modicum of attention and grub, while dogs and cats can - and probably should - be trained, lest your spiffy couch be reduced to a urine-soaked splinter. Since you can't control your varmints directly, you'll have to direct your sims to chastise Cerberos when he decides to drop bombs on the linoleum. The upshot of this frenetic behavioural shaping is that once Cuddles has learnt to use her kitty litter, keep those claws out of the chair legs, stay put and play dead, you can shuffle her off to earn her kibble. Yes, pets can be wage-slaves while your sims rot in bed all day watching telly and thinking about food. There's a range of pet-related accessories, as well as a new catalogue of natty futuristic furniture and interior decoration options. Another nifty addition is the Invite Household feature - call up your pal and tell him to drag his wife and brats along for some all-round family shenanigans.

Pets adds an engaging new dimension to the *Sims 2* franchise, but be warned: managing your new pals is time-consuming and quite tricky, and not recommend for beginners. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

Reviewed on PS2

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R399

■ Developer

Black Ops Entertainment

■ Publisher

Ubisoft

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

■ Genre

Sport

■ Age Restriction

3+

■ Specifications

Online: Yes

Controllers: 1-8

Players: 1-2 (1-8 with multitap)

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BOTTOM LINE

Flashy, exciting, and thoroughly entertaining in short bursts, but too lacking in substance.

65/100

AND 1 STREETBALL

TRASH TALK, NO MATTER how politically incorrect, has always been synonymous with Streetball. And where there's Streetball, there's AND 1. AND 1 is celebrated, in the States at least, as an innovative basketball apparel company. It takes its name from a commentator's cry when a player is fouled but scores anyway. The company's prominence, however, is largely due to its employ of a hotshot team of Streetballers. Each year this team tours America looking to enlist the next Streetball legend. Enter Ubisoft, who have created the first *AND 1* Streetball game, placing the player in the role of recruit-hopeful.

In the main mode of the game, players have a mechanical schedule to fulfil in each city, which soon becomes formulaic and uninspiring, despite variations in match types. The goal of the game is not to be the most complete baller around, but the one with the ability to confuse and embarrass competitors. Enter 'I-Ball moves'. It involves manipulating the analogue stick in combination with timing meters to produce a desired manoeuvre. If a high-end move is accomplished, it fills an Ankle-Breaker Meter, resulting in a rival stumbling and a clear run to the basket. Although credit is due for an innovative idea, its implementation is far less impressive. Trying to execute an intended move is downright difficult and, inexcusably, numbskull button bashing fills up the Ankle-Breaker in an amateurish, but far easier, manner.

Still, the game is fun, at least in small helpings and especially with friends. Nice touches include designing your very own breakdown moves and access to spectacular videos from the Mix Tape tour. The foundation is there for a top-notch game in the



future. However, lack of execution means this title remains fairly ordinary. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

Reviewed on 360

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R538

■ Developer

YUKE's

■ Publisher

THQ

■ Supplier

WWE [011] 462-0150

■ Genre

Sport

■ Age Restriction

16+

■ Specifications

Online: Yes

Players: 1-4

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BOTTOM LINE

Perhaps not at the top of the 360 line-up, but it's a solid wrestling game and great for groups.

80/100

WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW 2007

ONE OF THE MANY reasons we love console gaming is the fact that, unlike PC gaming, you can have a few friends over and everyone can enjoy it - it's social gaming at its best. *WWE: SVR* is a great example of this. Right off the bat, we'll state that even if you are not a WWE wrestling fan, you should enjoy this game especially if you play in the multiplayer mode. As you start the game, there are a few tutorials you can watch that will familiarise you with the control system and overall gameplay.

Probably one of the most exciting new features is the user-controlled environmental hotspots. This great feature allows players to make use of objects around the ring to inflict damage on their opponents. A player, for instance, can grab a fan's sign and use it as a weapon. Alternatively, you can also bash your opponent's head against the metal stairs of the ring. Visually this game is stunning. The wrestlers on which the characters are based look life-like; ditto the environments. There is also an abundance of wrestlers to choose from. These include most of the big names from both RAW and SmackDown. There are also seven Diva's you can choose from and 13 legends, which include the likes of The Rock, Hulk Hogan, and Steve Austin. Sadly, there are only three unlockable players to choose from. You can also create your own wrestler. The online capabilities of *WWE SmackDown! vs. RAW 2007* are also impressive, and you are able to fight for user-created belts and trade characters you created. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R50

Developer

Gameloft

Publisher

Gameloft

Supplier

www.thumbtribe.co.za

Genre

Platformer

Download Code

SMS: 0200300530 to 40978

Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS

RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS is just one of those wacky games that everyone has to try at some point just to see the humour. The game is set in a 2D platform world where the player can see many similarities between this game and *Sonic the Hedgehog* back in its earlier days. There are, of course, many traps to be sprung and surprises to be discovered as you wander through the eight levels, and a whole bunch of enemies in the forms of flying saucers, robotic rabbids, pirate rabbids, soldier rabbids, Sam Fisher rabbids, etc. To fight them off, Rayman has a completely new arsenal at his disposal such as wall walks, helicopter ear spins, plunger guns, and squirt guns. The levels are definitely quite fun and varied, but to be honest, the game has no replay value. One of its major pluses, though, comes in the sound, which is fully polyphonic and has all



the right effects to make you enjoy what time you have to play through. The graphics are also quite impressive and some good 3D artwork can be seen throughout the game making it unique in its own right. **NAG**

Fun, wacky and zany will all be used to describe this hilarious adventure game. **75/100**

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R50

Developer

THQ Wireless

Publisher

THQ Wireless

Supplier

www.thumbtribe.co.za

Genre

Action

Download Code

SMS: 0300300490 to 40978

Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

COMPANY OF HEROES

COMPANY OF HEROES WAS one of the best strategy games released in 2006, and the mobile version tries to follow its example. It is a direct tie-in to the original with rewards like codes that can be used on the PC version. The isometric engine that is used works well and the units and maps come out quite nicely with plenty of detail. In terms of gameplay, there is a lot: objectives are always different and the enemies have quite a unique AI system doing things differently every time. A lot of the terrain and objects are also destructible, depending on what weapons you use, such as an air strike or artillery. The sound is average, but it shouldn't matter to any player because it will be the last thing a player will care about thanks to the volume of action dished out. In the end, this game is well worth the few bucks it costs to download and it will provide a few decent hours of fun. **NAG**



A fresh and exhilarating wartime experience that captures the essence of its PC counterpart. **86/100**

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R40

Developer

Activision

Publisher

Activision

Supplier

www.thumbtribe.co.za

Genre

Action

Download Code

SMS: 07003021a0 to 40978

Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

CALL OF DUTY 3

AS HAS BECOME THE tradition with the *CoD* and *Brothers in Arms* mobile games, this game uses an isometric top-down view. This look feels a lot like the old *Cannon Fodder* series, but in terms of gameplay it is definitely different. There is a lot more detail, not to mention more action. Like the console versions of the same name, *COD3* has a proud WWII arsenal to choose from, as well as the need to take cover when facing hordes of enemies. Even sniping was brought to this version! Who would have thought? Anyway, to sum up, *COD3* has quite a number of missions, each with a lot of action, making it a game that will never get boring. The only fault that can be found with the game is the sound, which is pretty average for mobile games. It is all in polyphonic, which is good, but the effects are



hardly worth mentioning. **NAG**

Unique FPS with a hint of the old classics and loads of action **79/100**

SOMETIMES A GAME DOESN'T MAKE IT IN TIME TO BE REVIEWED FOR AN ISSUE. HOWEVER, WHILE YOU WAIT ANOTHER MONTH FOR OUR FINAL WORD, HERE'S OUR INITIAL OPINION ON WHAT'S NEW:



LOST PLANET [360]

"MY FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF *Lost Planet* were that of *Half-Life 2* in *Christmas Land*," one astute observer on the NAG forums recently noted. A valid observation, the snowy landscapes and bug-like aliens could easily contain a Gordon or two. The action thus far seems top-notch: it's exhilarating to throw a grenade and have enemies react in ways that just seem right. Whether or not the action will sustain itself, we'll have to wait and see - it could get old fast. We've not checked out multiplayer yet. We couldn't find any servers to join except once when we were thrust into a chaotic deathmatch with many French-speaking people all shouting at the top of their lungs.



RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS [PS2]

"IT'S LIKE RAYMAN MEETS *WarioWare* in this change of direction for the series. Huge bunnies, for some reason unfathomable at this point, kidnap Rayman and his friends. The bunnies then proceed to dump Rayman in an arena, where he's forced to run from gate to gate, taking part in all sorts of mini-games. The bunnies and mini-games alike are brilliant and entertaining. Most are familiar and all are simple, but they're slick and funny. They range from rhythm to whack-the-rat types to shearing sheep and throwing cows. Honestly. We need to finish the campaign to unlock that multiplayer mode, but the other three modes, so far, are a lot of fun. The big question is if contest mode can string everything together into a good party game for a crowd, but there's really no doubt at this stage."



SUPERMAN RETURNS [360]

"THERE IS SOMETHING REALLY awesome about *Superman Returns*, enough that you are willing to try and ignore the control scheme that seems to fight you. Why, for example, can't Superman jump? Why does he flail around like an idiot when you try to grab something? However, the game does take an interesting approach, and it is the first time that Superman's abilities are in so much of the gamer's control. The problems that plagued the development of the game, resulting in delay after delay (and missing the movie's release), don't seem to have been kind to Superman. Nevertheless, it is still interesting enough to keep playing. Hopefully, the pounding of robots will soon make room for more interesting opponents."



STAR TREK: LEGACY [PC]

"IT'S *STAR TREK*, so you're either going to be excited about this game or you're not. A quick skirmish battle without reading the manual lasted exactly four minutes and thirty-three seconds before a Borg cube shredded the ship. A quick glance at the manual was helpful and the first mission has a few boxes that pop up and explain what to do. The graphics aren't bad, but the ships and the environment don't fit well together - the whole blend ends up looking artificial. This title looked and sounded exciting, but after having played it for about ten minutes this enthusiasm completely faded. The controls also feel dodgy thanks to its console heritage - perhaps this one should have stayed on the Xbox 360. It might turn out okay but the odds are stacked against it. At the end of the day, it's a *Star Trek* game on the PC... we should have known better."



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II [360]

"AN RTS ON A console controller? WTF? Well, step back Jack, because so far it works damn well. We've progressed a fair way into the campaign mode already, despite dual analogues, and even managed to win a rather epic skirmish through subtle application of Left and Right trigger. We're too scared to go online and duke it out against a live opponent just yet - we get the feeling that we would be thoroughly pwned by an eight year old who's just come home from school and is having a quick game before doing homework. We're a little perturbed by the framerate issues *BFMEII*, which seem to be persisting."



STAR WARS LETHAL ALLIANCE [PSP]

"HHEY, LOOK! IT'S KYLE Katarn from *Jedi Knight: Dark Forces*! Sadly, you don't get to play him, you just meet him in the first minute of the game. In an interesting twist, in *Lethal Alliance* you play a Twi'lek (those aliens with the long tentacle thingies on their heads) mercenary. The game uses some form of Unreal Engine, and initial impressions aren't bad. The pew-pew laser sound effects are spot on, and the voice acting is actually competent. It looks so far to be very action centric, with plenty of shooting and what they call "collaborative fighting", but we've not seen that yet. But, for a PSP title, this one is looking quite sweet actually."

THESE AND OTHER REVIEWS IN OUR MARCH ISSUE

PLAYSTATION 3 WINS AWARDS

DAILY TECH REPORTED THAT, Sony Computer Entertainment America announced that it has been recognized by the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences with a Technology and Engineering Emmy Award for the PlayStation 3's SIXAXIS wireless controller. SCEA received the honor at an awards presentation being held at CES 2007 in Las Vegas. SCEA was also honoured with other awards at CES for the engineering behind PS3 including the CES Best of Innovations Award for 2007, PC World's 20 Most Innovative Products Award, Sound & Vision's Editor's Choice Award and Digital Entertainment Group's (DEG) Emiel N. Petrone Digital Innovation Award.



AMD'S R600 DELAYED YET AGAIN

AMD'S DX10 GRAPHICS CHIP has been delayed once again, and should only see the light of day in March. According to sources, manufacturing difficulties and a bug in the GPU are preventing the chip company from producing chips at a reasonable yield. This comes after a site closely associated with ATI released benchmarks of the upcoming chip against the competition's 8800GTX, where the R600 was leading in most of the tests by a narrow margin. Performance aside, the R600 is unlikely to be released this month or in February as previously expected.



XBOX 360 TO RECEIVE UPGRADE

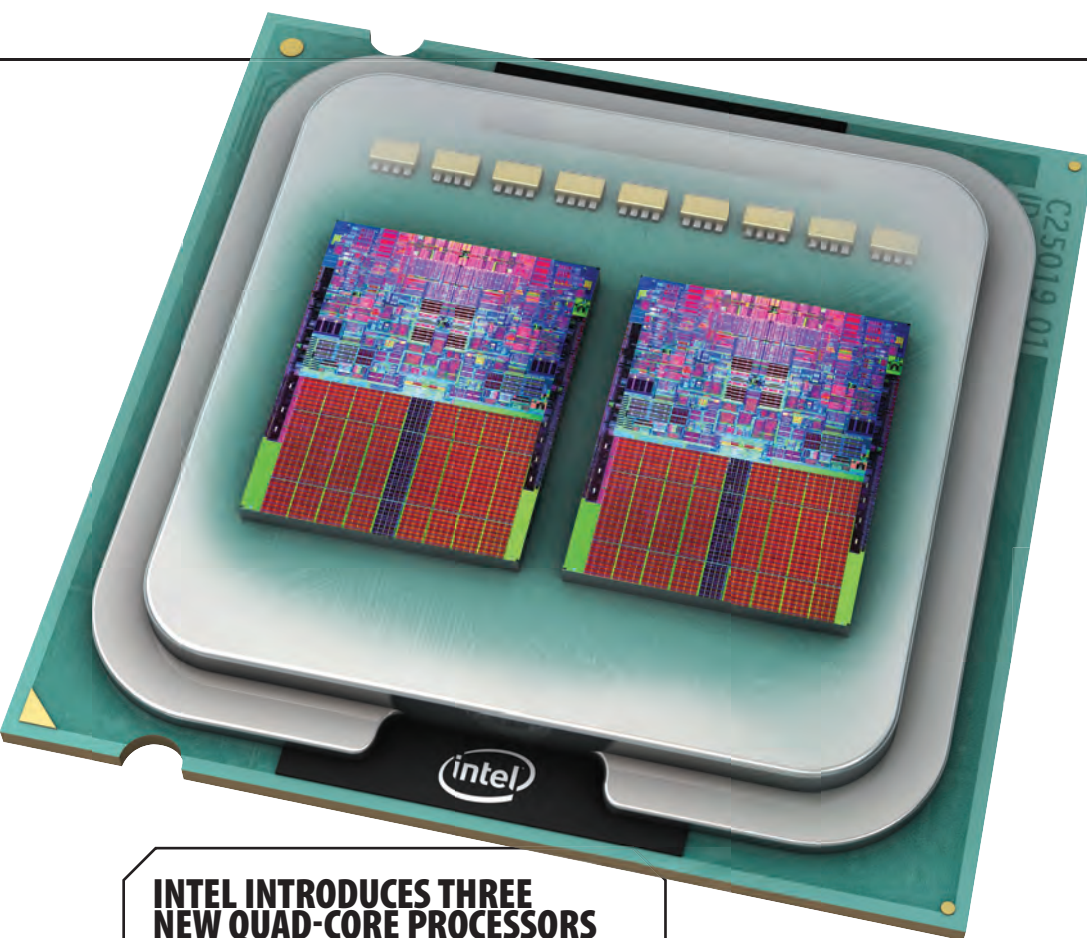
PICTURES HAVE CONFIRMED WHAT started out as a rumour that stated that the Xbox 360 will be receiving an upgrade. This would be in the form of a larger 120GB hard drive, doubling the best of Sony's efforts. With the larger hard drive would come a die shrink for the processing units from 90 to 65nm, and the ability to output a high-definition digital signal via an HDMI connector. When this upgrade will take place was not specified, but it is certain that it will happen sooner rather than later.



LOGITECH PERIPHERALS ENHANCE WINDOWS VISTA

LOGITECH SHOWCASED ITS PORTFOLIO of peripherals designed to work with Windows Vista at the Consumer Electronics Show, which took place in Las Vegas from 8th to 11th January 2007. While more than 100 Logitech peripherals will work with Windows Vista, some Logitech peripherals are optimised for the new OS. Products such as the Logitech Cordless Desktop MX 3200 Laser will offer easy access to the navigational features of Windows Vista, such as Flip 3D, while the Logitech MX Revolution cordless laser mouse has a dedicated Flip 3D thumb wheel so people don't have to move their hand from their mouse when changing applications.

If you purchase any Logitech mice, keyboards or webcams prior to the release of Logitech's product software for the Windows Vista operating system you will be able to download updated product software at www.logitech.com/downloads from 30 January.



INTEL INTRODUCES THREE NEW QUAD-CORE PROCESSORS

INTEL HAS INTRODUCED THREE new Kentsfield-based microprocessors, one for the desktop market and two for the server space. The desktop chip comes in the form of the Q6600 clocked at 2.4GHz and carrying a hefty launch price of \$851. In the server space, the two new CPUs come in the form of the LGA771 X3220 and the X3210, clocked at 2.4GHz and 2.13GHz respectively. All of these processors still feature the 1,066MHz FSB despite 1,333MHz CPUs being close to launch. Intel started shipping these CPUs on 5 January, and these CPUs are likely to have reached our shores by the time you read this.

HITACHI ANNOUNCES 1TB HARD DRIVE

HITACHI HAS ANNOUNCED A 1TB perpendicular magnetic storage hard drive, making it amongst the first consumer class hard drives to offer such a large capacity. The new drives will be available in the form of the CinemaStar 7K1000 and the Deskstar 7K1000. Both models will feature up to 32MB of Cache for the SATA models, with an average seek time of 8.5ms. The new hard drives can supposedly store more than 50 hours of full high-definition raw content, which would make them ideal for digital video recording as well.



ASUS INTRODUCES EXTERNAL GRAPHICS CARD

ASUS HAS LAUNCHED THE XG Station, the world's first external graphics solution for notebook computers. Equipped with an ExpressCard interface, USB 2.0, and Dolby headphones, the XG Station seamlessly integrates notebook computing with PC graphics power. ASUS demonstrated the unit featuring its EN7900GS graphics card.



ACERPOWER 2000

THE ACERPOWER 2000 IS a desktop PC housed in a compact chassis one tenth the size of a typical tower desktop. Built on the Intel 946GZ Express chipset, the AcerPower 2000 features an Intel Graphics Media Accelerator GMA 3000, 2 GB of DDR2 533/667 MHz memory with dual-channel support, 400 GB storage on a SATA 3 Gb/s hard disk, and eight USB 2.0 ports for easy connection of printers, flash drives, VoIP phones and other peripherals. The system is said to have a noise-output performance of just 26 dB and takes up only 3 litres in volume of desk space.

AWARDS

THE NAG HARDWARE AWARD is reserved for those products that really blow us away, whether by virtue of sheer grunt, value for money, or pure unspecified sexiness. This award will only be bestowed upon products that really stand out, even to our somewhat jaded and cynical eyes, and should be considered among the primary choices when purchasing products in the respective categories. Products that receive this accolade are beyond a doubt rather special. So watch out for them and take note!



THE ANATOMY OF SPEED

IF, AT ANY POINT, you have considered yourself an overclocker, then you will know that over the last eighteen months overclocking has taken a nosedive. The art/pastime at its lowest point had a handful of competitors locally and an equally abysmal number of participants overseas. There were, and still are, many reasons for this situation, with the most important being pricing and the changing face of computer hardware and the relevant benchmarks. The days of being concerned with only one benchmark are long past, and what was once the only relevant benchmark in the form of 3DMark2001 SE, has been replaced by three successive benchmarks, which more than anything else favoured deep pockets and cold temperatures. With what was once loved by many dying a slow and painful death, it was time to try and save the situation, and 2007 would be the perfect year to attempt a resurrection of the art of overclocking, where the brand and hardware would not do anything for you. That is where the South African Overclocking League comes in, where numbers are not the point of the competition, but effort. This means that those who previously relied on large budgets would have to actually earn their stripes by achieving a higher overclock than a synthetic score. More importantly, the fun would be back for the disenfranchised veterans who held South Africa's flag high with half the hardware fellow competitors from other countries had.

Therefore, we decided that nothing would be better than to bring back extreme cooling (compared to chilled air and water at least). With the intention of achieving some of the highest scores in the world (fastest in the country too), we collected some hardware we had around that amounted to some serious computing power in the form of the following parts:

- Intel X6800 CPU;
- 2 x Corsair XMS2 PC8000 RAM;
- Western Digital WD1500 Raptor hard drive;
- ASUS Striker Extreme;
- ABIT AW9D-MAX;
- Biostar T680i SLI Deluxe;
- 2 x ASUS EN8800GTS;
- ASUS EN8800GTX;
- AOpen 700W PSU;
- Enermax Noisetaker 600W;
- Airtech desk fan;
- 750ml acetone and custom copper tubes and blocks (courtesy of South Africa's 3DOC team);
- 16kg dry ice;
- Akasa AK-450 (the best thermal paste for subzero temperatures).

PREPARATION

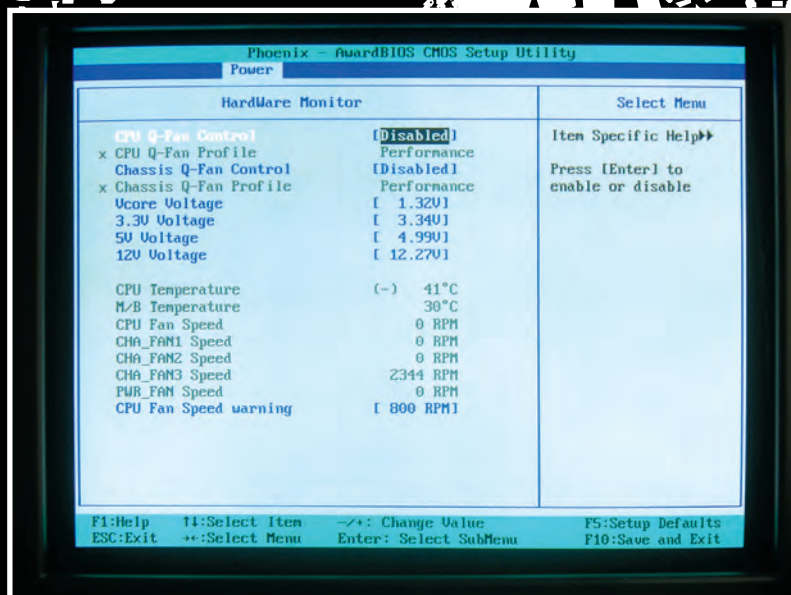
In many ways, setting up for dry ice runs is easier than many may imagine. However, at the same time the risks are increased tenfold at the least. Besides the obvious ones, condensation, water, and ice (from freezing water) are what one wants to avoid. So extra care had to be taken to get as smooth a finish on the blocks and CPU heatspreader as possible, along with sealing the socket and preventing water from seeping between and under the pins. Superfine wet sanding left us with a mirror like finish on the CPU, and all that was left was the mounting of the blocks on the CPU itself.

With the block mounted, about 50ml of acetone was poured into the tube and a single pallet placed into the tube. While the resulting bubbling and white mist was exciting, it was also rather dangerous, so the tube was further filled with pellets, which stopped the fumes and brought the tube to the right temperature. Minus forty degrees Celsius is an impressive temperature, but to be able to reach useful speeds on the CPU we needed much colder temperatures in the region of -70°C. With repositioning of the tube and reapplication of the paste, this temperature was achieved and the system BIOS reported an internal temperature of -89°C, which indicated perfect mounting and contact.

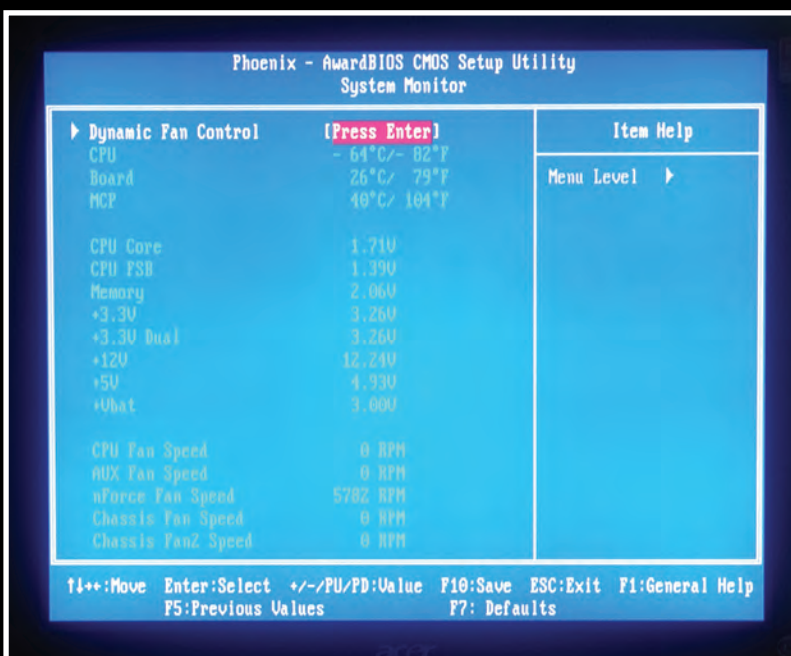
Getting into Windows at 4GHz (400MHz x 10) wasn't a problem at 1.5V, and a quick run of SuperPi 1M was run to make sure the system was stable. (Please note that a stable SuperPi 1M result is no indication of a stable system.) The system passed the test as it should have and the system was restarted a number of times to find the most stable RAM settings and speed. Since using a 680i-based motherboard meant that our memory speed could be set independently from the FSB, we set the memory at 800MHz to 2.075V at 5-4-4-12. With an 11x multiplier, we booted into Windows at 4.67GHz. (The low memory speed and relaxed memory timings were unfortunately a bug that existed either on the motherboard or RAM, which made it impossible for the RAM to break the 1,000MHz mark - so we settled for the most stable speed with the tightest timings possible.)

SUPERPI 1.5XS

At 4.67GHz, the SuperPi 1M test resulted in an impressive 11.359s, making it, at the time, the fastest 1M calculation in the country. While this time could have been improved tremendously with various system tweaking such as copying of



If you are cooling with DICE these temperatures are a sign of trouble



Better mounting and thermal paste - resulted in much better temperatures

large files during the test, the improvement would have been minimal because the memory speed was low. Therefore, SuperPi didn't get the treatment that others would have given to the result, where one could easily have shaven 0.2s to 0.3s off the time at the same clock speed.

AQUAMARK3

Since Aquamark3 is the shortest of the visual benchmarks, it was tested first. The results, however, were less than impressive, averaging 175,000 points, which was much lower than the score should have been. Therefore, the motherboard was changed for the ABIT AW9D-MAX motherboard and only one 8800GTX was used instead of two 8800GTS cards. This change in motherboard also meant that we had to use a lower CPU frequency of 4.4GHz (367 x 12), as the motherboard could not do a 400MHz FSB. Being a i975 chipset motherboard, it also meant that we had limited memory ratios. We set the memory speed above the 1,000MHz mark and relaxed the timings to 5-5-4-12. After installing the 8800GTX, we ran the test again and recorded 211,048 points, which became the local record. Unfortunately, Massive Development went under in 2005, which meant that an accurate international ranking was impossible, so we had to settle for a local record and call it a day.

3DMARK2001 SE

This benchmark was and possibly still is the most balanced graphics benchmark in the history of the series. While it also scales infinitely with increasing CPU speeds and only has one GPU dependent test, it had greater coherency with the games of the times than the current versions do with today's games. More than any other benchmark, 2001 SE had tweaks that would span pages, including out-of-order game tests and others, which can be the difference from scoring a front page score and getting a score lost in the pages that nobody looks at.

With this version of 3DMark, running SLI actually reduces CPU efficiency and results in measurably lower individual scores for the first three game tests, only benefiting the last (Nature). However, because of the weighting of the last game test and the advantage SLI brings to this test, the numbers are better with SLI than without for the same configuration.

Once again, motherboards had to be changed in favour of the Biostar T680i SLI Deluxe and a second 8800GTX was added to the mix. What we must admit is that the GTX cards were not overlocked and only had the desk fan blowing on them to control the high temperatures of the G80 core. While a number of visual tweaks were performed, these were not worth 25MHz on the cores

and much higher scores could have been achieved. This was an oversight on our side and probably robbed us of our correct placing on the front page of the ORB (Online Result Browser).

Much like with SuperPi we performed no extra system tweaks and tested the system under its default software settings, and recorded a front page worthy 80,700 3DMarks, which was more than 13,000 points higher than the previous best in the country with two Radeon X1900XT cards in CrossFire and a slightly lower CPU speed. Unfortunately, at the time we were not aware that the ASUS Striker Extreme would have allowed a higher CPU clock in the order of 200MHz. Needless to say, had we repeated the tests we could have easily added 4-5K points to our score. Nevertheless, we were satisfied with 17th place in the world out of more than two million results.

3DMARK03

Over the last two years, 3DMark03 has started to behave much like 3DMark2001 SE. Unfortunately it exaggerates the dependence on individual components, mainly CPU speed and graphics card power. Once again, the fourth test proved to be the most demanding test of the lot. What one needs to be aware of is that 3DMark03, because of the framerates at certain points in GT3 (Troll's lair) and GT4 (Nature), may seem to be more demanding on the graphics card than 3DMark05 and possibly 3DMark06. This is not the case, but is a result of the rendering process in those scenes that negates the polygon culling and clipping techniques in modern day graphics cards. (Some may remember the fixed clipping distances inserted into early release 50 ForceWare drivers for NVIDIA GeForce FX cards.) This is simply poor polygon management leading to tremendous depth complexity (overflow) by the benchmark, hence framerates dropping from over 1,000 to under 70 then back up again. When testing with 3DMark03, we used two 8800GTS cards instead of the GTX cards, because the AOpen 700W would not have been able to power the two GTX cards and the CPU at above 4.54GHz, where the draw under load would easily have overpowered the unit. With our new configuration, the clock at 4.58GHz (417 x 11) and graphics core clocks at 620MHz and 2.0GHz (memory), we were able to score 55,980 points in the benchmark. The score was much higher than anything else locally and easily made the configuration the fastest 8800GTS powered system in the world. With 8800GTX cards, the score would have been the other side of 60,000 and possibly 70,000 points, but fell short because the GTX cards are that much more powerful than the GTS cards. (An 8800GTS at a 640MHz core and 2GHz memory is slower than a standard 8800GTS at reference clocks of 575MHz/1.8GHz.) Proving the superiority of the 8800GTX

over the 8800GTS in this benchmark is the placing of the score on the ORB front page where the lowest score is above the 65,000-point mark where no 8800GTS powered system appears.

3DMARK05

The shortest of the benchmarks from Futuremark, 3DMark05 was our favourite (because of the length) and not surprisingly earned us our highest placing of 10th position in the world with a score of 26,138. Not only that, but being the only configuration powered by 8800GTS cards in the top 20, it beat many other systems clocked higher and featuring 8800GTX cards in SLI. 3DMark05, though, is starting to show signs of CPU limitations as the results on the front page of the ORB ranking indicate. The benchmark does benefit from added cores (QX6700 for example), but not as much as 3DMark06, and as a result is closer to 3DMark2001 SE than 3DMark03. Therefore, the results represent performance closer to general game performance than anything else, despite not being based on an existing game engine. Out of all the benchmarks, 3DMark05 is also the only benchmark that didn't require multiple runs or crash at any point with unfamiliar errors, making it the highlight of the entire process, and proving that record attempts need not take the whole day as we spent ten minutes at the most on this benchmark.

3DMARK06

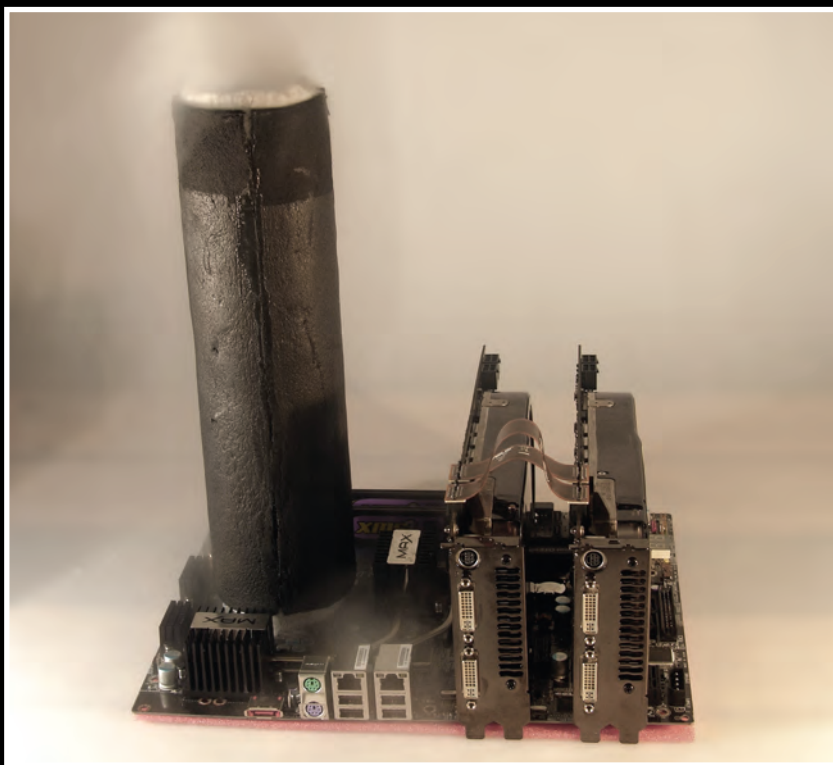
This version, along with its older brother, was patched a few days before testing to make it Windows Vista compatible. Thus, it became quicker to load and in general a system-friendly benchmark instead of the resource hog it previously was. With that, it also inherited a nasty feature that makes it impossible to get a score (with the free version) unless you are online. Fortunately, this was not a problem for us, but it is something to be wary of in future as it means that instead of taking a screenshot, one has to save the score right after finishing the tests. The benchmark will not automatically save a score. As often seen at these speeds, the system may crash at any point.

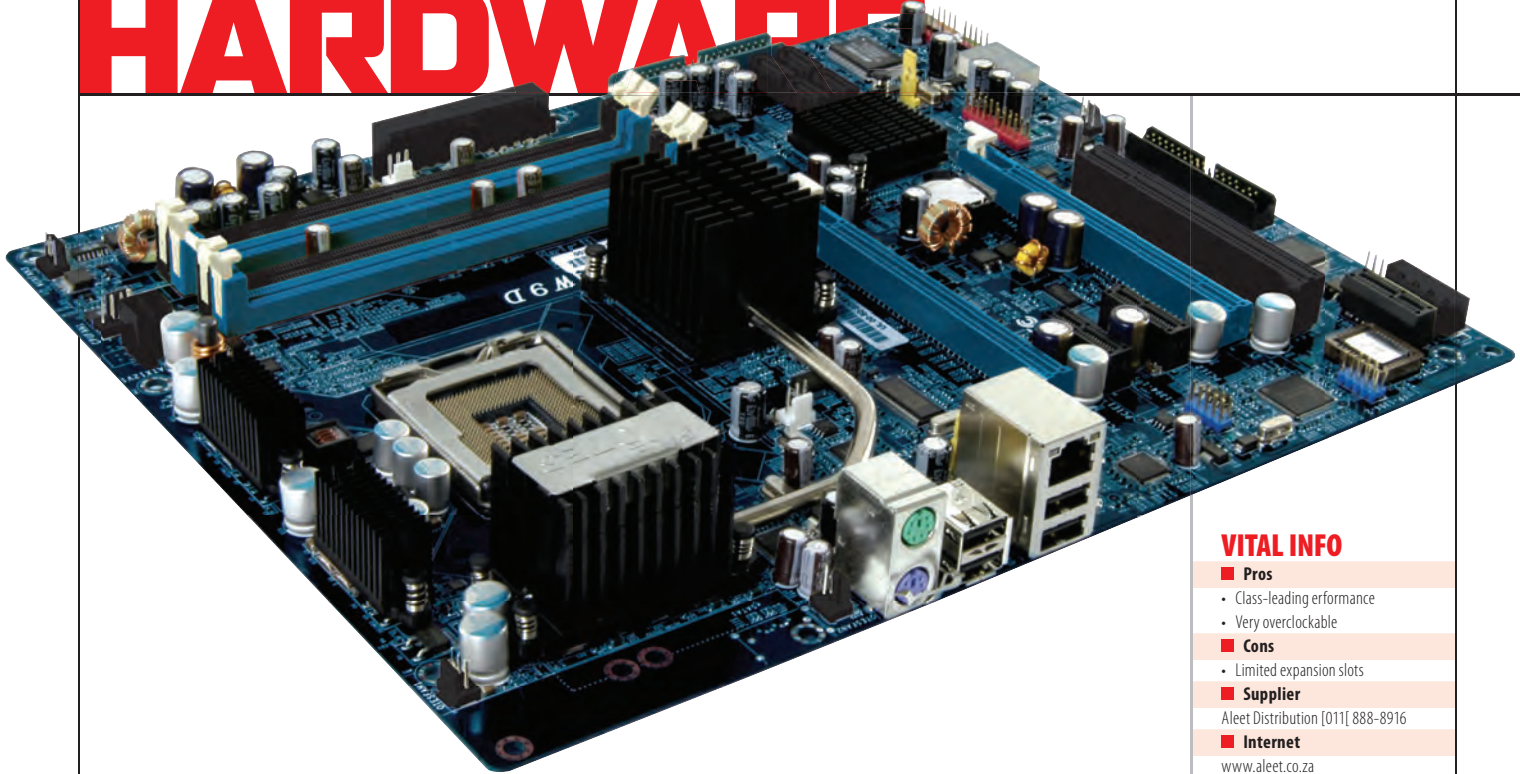
We were hoping to go through this as quickly as we did with the previous version. However, this benchmark crashed four times during the CPU tests before it was stable. Each time this raised the GPU temperature, so with every run the risk of a crash due to graphics card overheating was increased. This benchmark became a test of patience and willpower after the third crash at exactly the same point. Dropping the CPU frequency slightly and adding more voltage to the already high 1.63V resulted in a stable system that gave a score of 17,138 points - the highest

score in the country at the time by far, and the fastest 8800GTS powered system in the world. However, our victory was short-lived. A week later our score was bettered by 200 odd points by someone with a quad-core CPU. Since 3DMark06 has a dedicated CPU test, it meant that the 3.5GHz clock of that CPU would give a much higher CPU score than our 4.5GHz X6800 - a classic example of what essentially destroyed overclocking and made benchmarking what it is today.

GOOD NUMBERS

With all the benchmarks and their results, 16kg of dry ice, and burnt and crossed fingers, we managed to sweep all the local records in all benchmarks and all the records for the 8800GTS in the world. By the time you read this, that would have all changed and higher and even more impressive scores will be around, but that's expected and ensures that we always look to do even better with even better hardware. 2007 should be a much better year in all respects than 2006, and with the overclocking league having started recently, overclocking should pick up from its lull. Most importantly, the fun and skill involved in overclocking will return. **NAG**





ABIT AW9D-MAX

WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF Intel's Core 2 Duo CPUs, many motherboard manufacturers have found that they don't have much choice when it comes to the chipset used for their products. Unlike the AMD platform, where chipsets from ULI, ATI, VIA and mainly NVIDIA have been available, with the Intel CPUs the options are mainly between the i975 and the slightly newer i965. The promise of an ATI chipset has yet to be fulfilled, and with the acquisition of ATI by AMD, it may be that this chipset may never see the light of day - at least on an Intel platform. While the NVIDIA nForce4 Intel edition has been featured on a number of boards that support Core 2 CPUs, as far as performance goes, they have not fared well, which leaves the manufacturers and users with only one real choice, and that is the i975 chipset.

This is where ABIT comes in. While ABIT isn't the first with an enthusiast board featuring the chipset, its solution is well worth the wait. Following in the footsteps of legendary motherboards such as the NF7-S and IC7-MAX, the AW9D-MAX looks set to continue the tradition.

The packaging is the familiar ABIT box, similar to the Fatal1ty range, but with blue tints instead of reds.

The AW9D-MAX is a well laid-out and cleverly designed motherboard. There is plenty of space for CrossFire configurations, and there are no connectors that are obscured by capacitors and other motherboard components. The simplicity of the design is what makes working with this motherboard a pleasure. Unlike with the other lines, the MAX range (and in particular the A9WD) is about performance and not aesthetics.

The BIOS of the AW9D-MAX is easy to read and very easy to navigate, almost to the point where it seems oversimplified. Once again, this simplicity gives more power to the end-user, and doesn't get in the way of overclocking, which is what many will buy this motherboard for.

As far as performance goes, the ABIT AW9D-MAX is slightly faster than other motherboards based on the same chipset.

Where this motherboard truly excels is in its ability to reach high bus speeds without much tweaking. While many motherboards require an increase in the MCH voltage to attain speeds greater than 330MHz on the FSB, the AW9D-MAX needed no such tweaking. During testing, the motherboard was stable up to 433MHz with the MCH voltage still unchanged from the default 1.5V. Monitoring the Northbridge temperatures indicated that the chipset was not under severe stress, as the temperature hovered around the 44°C mark.

Higher speeds on the FSB will be CPU dependent, as many Core 2 users have discovered. On an E6600 CPU, the previous best was 400MHz, irrespective of cooling or voltage used, which further leads us to believe that overclocking on this motherboard is somewhat dependent on your particular CPU rather than the board.

At any rate, 400MHz means that on an E6600 you will be able to reach 3.6GHz, which is a 1.2GHz overclock - a respectable speed by any measure and one where the increased FSB will be evident in snappier system response and faster framerates.

With the introduction of 333MHz FSB CPUs from Intel, it is good to know that you won't need a new motherboard if you already have the AW9D-MAX. All it would take would be hand tweaking on the user side to set 333MHz in the BIOS.

One of the AW9D-MAX's other highlights is the ability to save overclocking profiles and load them on the fly. Almost every aspect of the AW9D-MAX seems to have been thoroughly examined and has had unnecessary features removed, which leaves the user with a lean motherboard that can outperform many motherboards on the market. However, ABIT may have overdone it a little. With only a single PCI slot, a capture card and add-on audio card are out of the question, so you will want to avoid this motherboard if you own more than one expansion card. Other than that, the board is worth mentioning in the same sentence as ABIT's previous champions. If you're in the market for a Core 2 motherboard, then you would do yourself a disservice by missing out on the AW9D-MAX. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

- Class-leading performance
- Very overclockable

■ Cons

- Limited expansion slots

■ Supplier

Aleet Distribution [011] 888-8916

■ Internet

www.aleet.co.za

■ RRP

R 2,495

■ Reviewer

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

■ Chipset

Intel 975X

■ CPU support

Intel Pentium 4/D/EE / Intel Core 2/EE

■ Memory support

4 x DIMM slots dual-channel DDR2
533/667/800MHz

■ Expansion slots

2 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI-E 1x, 1 x PCI, 1 x
AudioMax slot, 1 x FDD, 1 x ATA100/66/
33 IDE, 7 x SATA II slots

■ Sound

AudioMax HD 7.1 (Realtek ALC882,
Dolby Digital Live!)

■ Networking

2 x Gigabit Ethernet ports

■ Overclocking

FSB settings 200-500MHz, Vcore
1.28V-1.75V, VDIMM 1.8-2.45V, MCH &
PCI-E 1.5-2.0V

■ Ports

10 x USB 2.0, 2 x 139 Headers, keyboard/
mouse PS/2

■ Dimensions

(L x W): 305mm x 245mm

G.SKILL PC6400 F2 DDR2 800

WITH BOTH INTEL AND AMD having moved to DDR2, the competition between manufacturers has changed from offering the tightest timings to offering the highest speed at the tightest timings. While timings of 4-4-4-12 would never have been considered tight for DDR, they are somewhat coveted with DDR2, because DDR2 has high timings inherently and doesn't have the voltage range that was available with DDR.

G.Skill, familiar to every enthusiast, is one of the manufacturers that have risen to the challenge of producing 800MHz sets, and pairing those frequencies with low latencies. At the same time, the pricing of the G.Skill set is aggressive, making it a worthwhile consideration for a 2GB set just on price alone.

With a number of Core 2 motherboards reaching high FSB speeds, the need for high-speed memory is increasing in proportion to the number of motherboards being introduced. Considering that the most valuable part of the original Core 2 line-up is the E6600 with a 9x multiplier, you realise that to reach 3.6GHz, which many E6600 CPUs are capable of, you'll need a 400MHz FSB.

At 400MHz, the RAM showed impressive performance on the Core 2 Duo we used, but to see the real bandwidth advantage we had to turn to an AMD Athlon64-based system, because of the integrated controller. With that, the recorded memory bandwidth was massive at just over 11GB/sec. The advantage of this memory bandwidth is evident in media encoding and other processing tasks that rely on huge amounts of data streaming.

If you are using an integrated graphics processor, the advantage of high-speed low latency memory will be obvious, as the memory bandwidth made available to your graphics core will increase your frame rates by large margins.

Overclocking the PC6400 proved to be a hit and miss affair. On the Core 2 system, the maximum stable overclock was 910MHz at the default 4-4-4-12 timings at 2.0V. However, on the AMD system, the RAM was capable of reaching 1,033MHz at 2.0V at 4-4-4-12. These differences can probably be attributed to the internal memory controller on the AMD system being better than the Northbridge controller on the i965 chipset.

At this overclock, the heat spreaders on the RAM heated up pretty quickly, but never to the point where we considered adding active cooling to the modules. Should you choose to, however, you could probably push the RAM on an AMD or maybe a 975 chipset past the respective speeds achieved here.

G.Skill has produced a no-frills set of RAM aimed at performance. The set is ideal for the casual gamer, but even better for the enthusiast who can never have enough speed. Since the set is rated at between 1.9 to 2.0V, higher voltages than 2.0V were not attempted, but there is no doubt that 2.05V would allow a higher overclock.

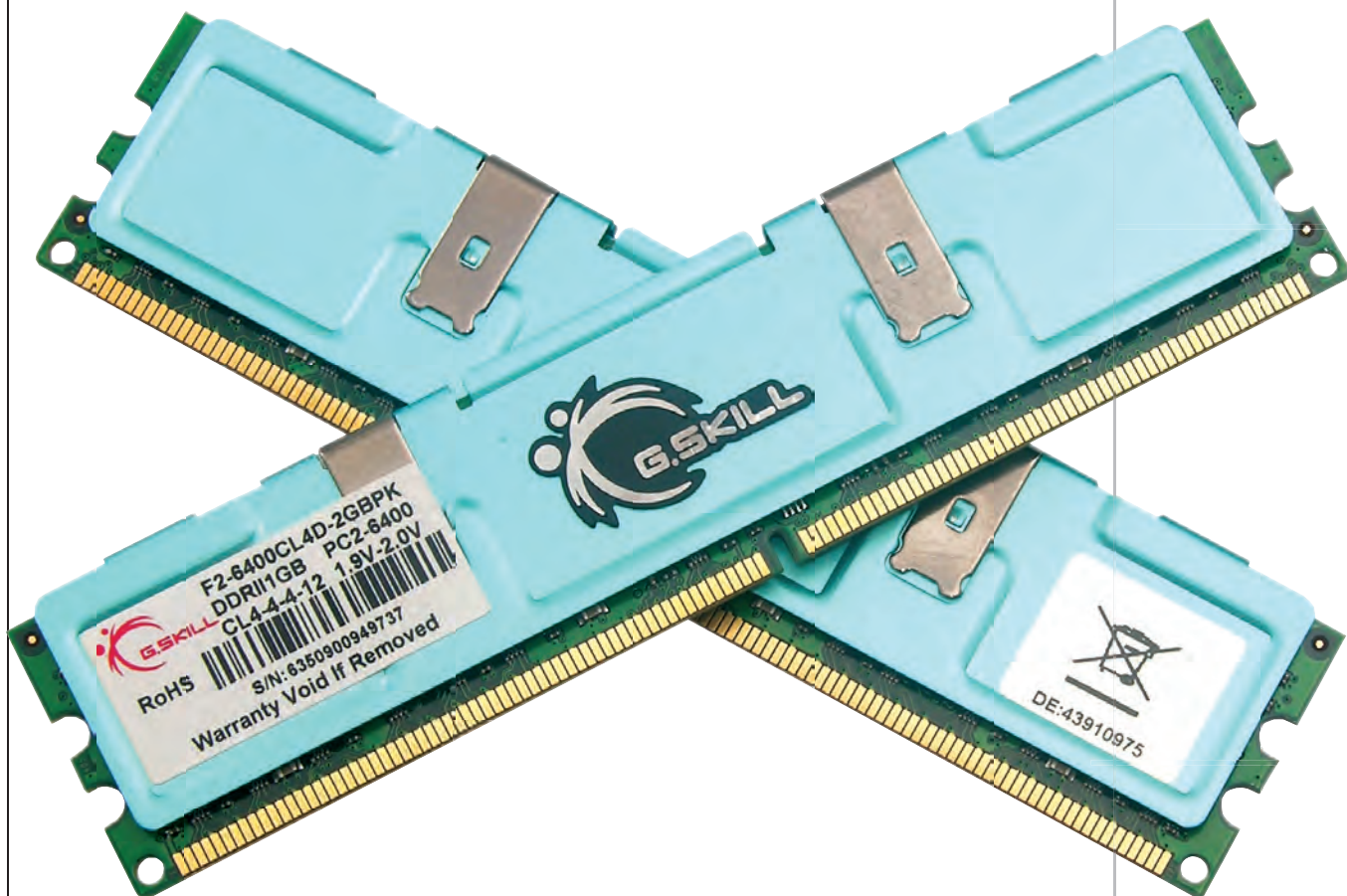
The G.Skill PC6400 F2 DDR2 800 delivers beyond expectation. 2GB sets are not cheap and the G.Skill set does well to be ever so slightly cheaper than comparable sets from OCZ, Mushkin, Kingston, and other enthusiast-orientated brands. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros
• Over delivers on performance claims
Cons
• Would have to wait for your order to arrive
Supplier
Prophecy
Internet
www.prophecy.co.za
RRP
R2,999
Reviewer
Neo Sibeko

SPECS

DDR rating
PC6400
Frequency
800MHz
CAS latency
4
RAS to CAS delay
4
RAS precharge
4
Active to precharge delay
12



BIOSTAR TF680i SLI DELUXE

DURING THE LAST 18 months or so, Biostar has been tapping into the seemingly lucrative enthusiast market. While this sector has never generated high volume sales, it has high margins, short upgrade cycles, and responds much better than the OEM market to advertising. This has led to an increase in enthusiast-targeted hardware, so much so that Intel has embraced the enthusiast community with its BadAxe series motherboards. Biostar, though, has chosen the relatively new NVIDIA MCP55 chipset to base its highest-level board on. The TF680i SLI Deluxe is unlike anything else Biostar has put together. What is sure to catch your eye when you come across this motherboard is the black utility bag, which Biostar has packed with all the cabling, discs and connectors you'll need to be up and running as soon as possible. More than that, however, Biostar has thoughtfully included two pairs of RAM sinks, which will be much appreciated by those planning to make use of the vast RAM overclocking options of the motherboard.

As for the motherboard, nowhere is it indicated that it's a Biostar board. The only branding on the board is the NVIDIA logo, which reassures (or worries you, depending on how you look at it) that NVIDIA's reference board contractor manufactures this board.

Prior to the launch of the MCP55-based motherboards last year, the new chipset was rumoured to be far better than the nForce500-based boards in terms of stability, overclocking, and features. This is true in all respects, as the previous generation nForce motherboards were limited to low overclocking speeds, with many topping out at the 320MHz mark, making them particularly weak when compared to i975-based motherboards, which were frequently capable

of more than 366MHz and some well over the 400MHz mark. The MCP55 chipset seems to be a much better chipset as it allowed the Biostar board to reach an impressive 440MHz without any adjustments to any voltage on the Northbridge or CPU.

The BIOS has a multitude of settings, which would probably allow further overclocking, but with the CPU used, the motherboard wasn't capable of more than 440MHz irrespective of the multiplier. 440MHz is adequate for most, but somewhat limiting for CPUs with lower multipliers such as the E6300 and E6400.

One of the highlights of the nForce series motherboards is the ability to operate the RAM independently of the FSB, not through dividers like on other chipsets, but through an almost separate PLL, which controls the memory. This will be useful for many who don't have high-speed RAM, which can be the limiting component in an overclocked system. This is also a boon for those who have PC8000 or PC8500 RAM and who don't want to overclock their systems to make use of their RAM at its rated speed. With the Biostar T680i (or any other nForce5/6 board), you can enter the speed you want and either get the exact speed or close enough to that speed, so only minimal overclocking is needed.

The Biostar TF680i is a good motherboard with a good package, but it's a tad expensive (retailing for more than R3,500) for a reference board, especially considering that you can buy other 680i-based boards for less. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros

- Overclocking
- Performance
- 1,200MHz SLI memory support

Cons

- Price

Supplier

Comstar 011 314 5812

Internet

www.comstara.co.za

RRP

R3,699

Reviewer

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CPU

LGA Pentium 4/ Core 2 Series

Chipset

NVIDIA nForce 680i SLI SPP

Memory

Dual-channel DDR2

533/667/800/1,200MHz

Storage

1 x FDD, 1 x IDE, 6 x SATA 3Gb/s

Ports and headers

PS/2, 10 x USB 2.0, 8-channel audio, 2 x FireWire

Audio

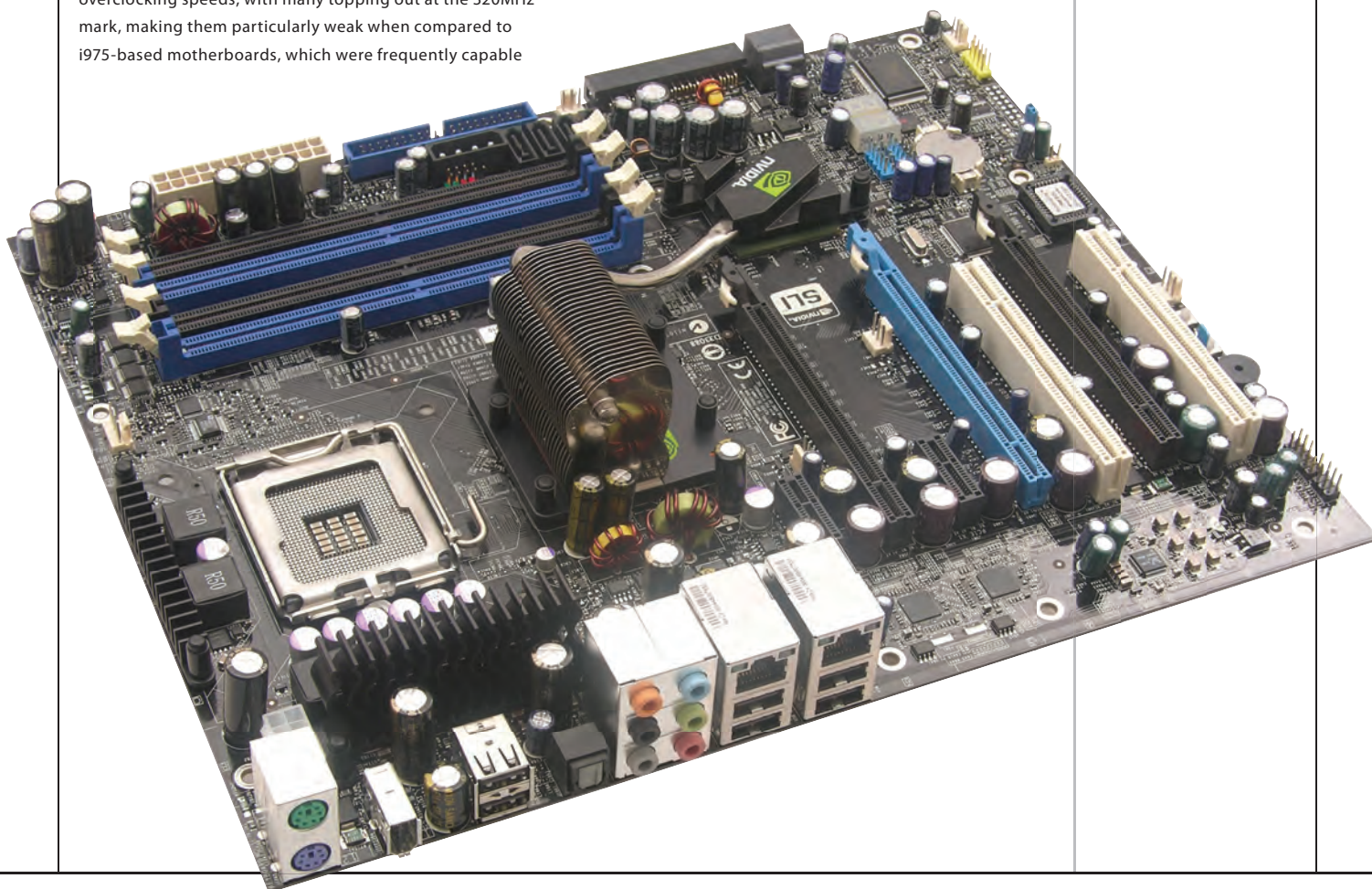
Realtek ALC 885 7.1-channel HD audio

LAN

2 x Gigabit Ethernet

Dimensions

ATX form factor: 30.5cm x 24.4cm



GIGABYTE GA-965P-DQ6 RE2

RIGHT, WE HAVE TO start this review with just a little bit of history. We'll try to keep it brief... When we first received a sample of the brand-new DQ6 motherboard from Rectron last year (when the Intel 965 chipset was the latest and hottest thing out there), we were blown away. It turned out to be an absolute overclocking monster, exactly what Gigabyte had said the DQ6 would be, and we gave it a mammoth score as a result.

Therefore, we were devastated when a DQ6 provided later seemed to go out of its way to disprove this result. The early board we received was, obviously, a pre-production press sample. The final retail product bombed horribly in all our tests. What a shame.

Fortunately, Gigabyte was quick to respond, and within just a few weeks, Tim from Gigabyte Taiwan handed us the latest retail revision of the DQ6, dubbed the "RE2." This one, he said, was more like the press sample we had originally tried, with the added bonus of including a better quality audio subsystem.

Well, we could only try it, couldn't we?

The RE2 sports the same complex array of heatpipes for cooling the chipset and the voltage circuitry arrayed around the CPU socket as its first incarnation, still coupled to a CrazyCool plate screwed onto the underside of the board to further assist temperature regulation. It uses the more advanced ICH8R Southbridge chipset, allowing for multiple types of RAID configuration on any of the six SATA ports provided, as well as AHCI support, required for the use of NCQ (Native Command Queuing) found on newer SATA hard drives.

There are two PEG slots, one with a full 16x lanes dedicated to it and the other pulling the 1x lanes from the other three PCI Express slots found on this board for a 4x configuration. Of course, this layout will only support ATI's CrossFire multi-GPU technology, and not SLI.

The BIOS of the RE2 is identical to that of the older variation of this product, which is fine since it's

absolutely filled to the gills with overclocking options. For instance, the CPU voltage can be adjusted up to a monstrous 2.365V maximum! Memory speeds can also be altered via a sensible multiplier option, and Gigabyte has even included a CPU clock multiplier, which will work with Core 2 Duo CPUs of lower than Extreme Edition status, which is nice. With our E6700 installed, the multiplier range available to us was 6x to 10x. Good enough.

However, the capabilities of the bus itself are more important when looking at overclocking a Conroe CPU. Our original press sample DQ6 had sailed way beyond 400MHz on the FSB and remained stable, but the retail model couldn't go beyond a far more lacklustre 350MHz. Time to see what the RE2 revisions have done.

With the clock multiplier lowered to 6x, the FSB of the board just kept on trucking – right up to 430MHz in fact – before chipset temperatures stopped proceedings. This was with our E6700 processor nicely insulated from excessive thermal output using a Swiftech water-cooling setup, so the CPU could have gone further had the chipset remained cooler.

Online, there are reports of these boards scaling right up to their maximum possible FSB setting of 600MHz! At first these reports were called into question, but now they appear to be true – a phenomenal performance by the DQ6, but surely only possible in colder climates or within heavily-air-conditioned environments.

Still, the DQ6 RE2 is without a doubt far superior to the first retail iteration of this board, and much closer to the impressive press sample we originally received (which scored well over 90% in *Custom PC* SA last year). It is still, however, quite expensive for a 965-based board, but buyers who want the best Intel Core 2 Duo platform are likely to pay the asking price. If this is the case, we can recommend the DQ6 RE2, but make sure you don't get an older RE1 version! **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros

- Good OC potential, vastly superior to "RE1" DQ6

Cons

- Two PEG slots but using the 2nd will block at least 4 SATA ports,

Supplier

Rectron [011] 203-1000

Internet

www.rectron.co.za

RRP

R2,499

Reviewer

Russell Bennett

SPECS

Chipset

Intel P965 northbridge and Intel ICH8R southbridge

CPU support

All LGA775 processors including Intel Core 2 Duo/Extreme

RAM

DDR2 400/533/667/800/1066, 8GB total, 4 slots

Graphics Support

PCI Express, 2 physical PEG x16 slots (no multi-GPU support: x16 and x4 support, respectively)

Expansion

3 x PCI-Ex1, 2 x PCI

Networking

Marvell 88E8053 PCI-E GbE FireWire 3x FW400; two on-board headers and one on I/O

Audio

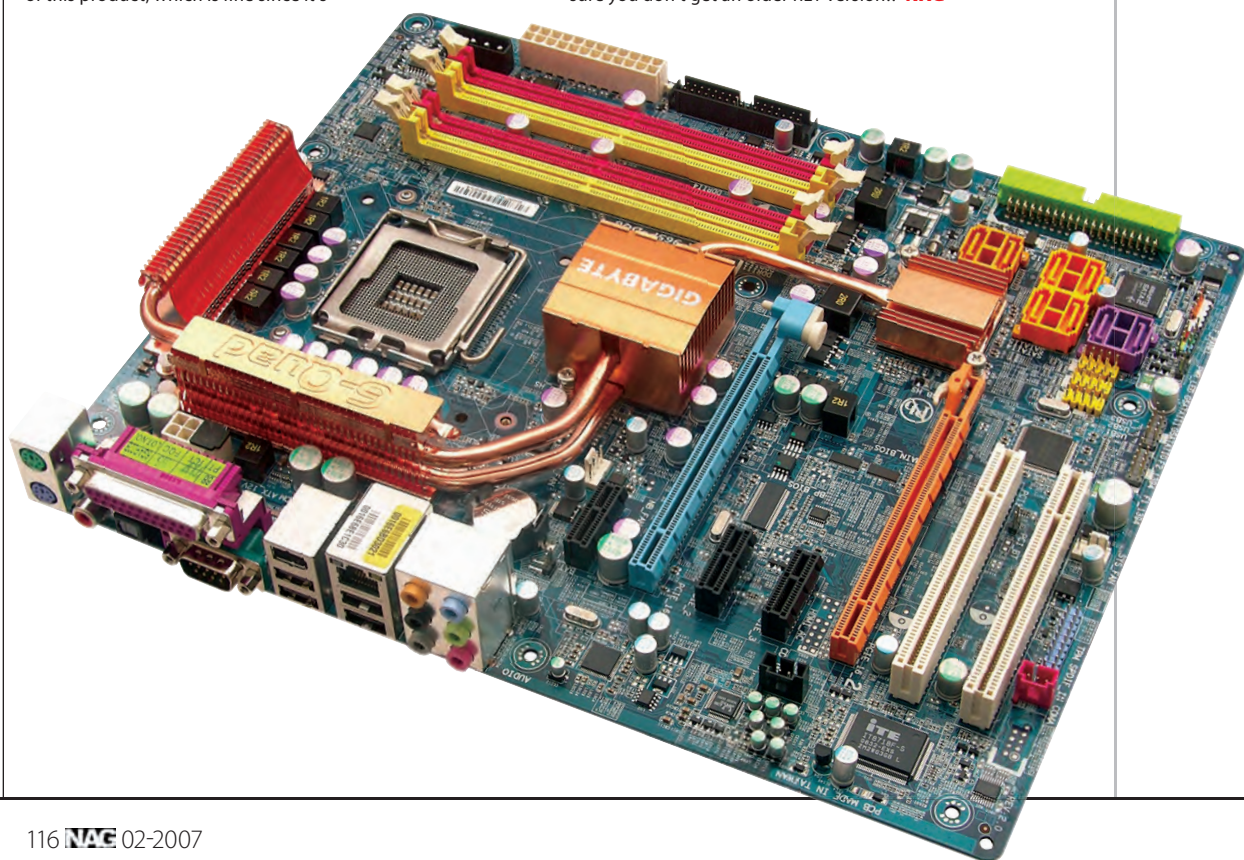
Realtek ALC888DD; HD Audio, 10-channel (7.1+2), Jack-sensing, optical TosLink and coaxial digital out

USB/ICH8R southbridge

10 ports USB2.0; 4 on I/O panel + 3x 2-port headers

Storage architecture

8 SATA 300, RAID0,1,0+1,5. ATA133, FDD



ASUS P5N32-SLI PREMIUM

IF YOU'RE WONDERING IF you've read the review of this motherboard in this magazine before, you haven't. Have you read our P5N32 review? You probably have. ASUS is obviously fond of the P5N32 name, and as such has named a number of its motherboards based on different chipsets and features the same. This can be a little confusing and irritating if you're shopping for a motherboard and aren't well versed in the seemingly slight differences in the motherboards. The P5N32-SLI Premium, unlike its earlier incarnation as the P5N32-SLI Deluxe, is based on the nForec590 SLI chipset instead of the nForce4 SLI Intel Edition chipset. This means that it benefits from features such as GPU-EX (for GeForce graphics cards only), EPP memory support (Enhanced Performance Profiles), and better CPU support which is only measurable in terms of better overlocks.

The P5N32-SLI Premium is a classic example of this as it out-clocks the SLI Deluxe by a good 20 to 30MHz, which translates into FSB speeds in excess of 330MHz compared to the 300MHz that the SLI-Deluxe would top out at. With the added overclocking headroom, the Premium board allows better memory bandwidth utilisation at the same memory speed and clock speed, as you can now scale the CPU to memory speed to the same ratio to reach 330MHz on the FSB and 660MHz on the memory.

Without a decent BIOS, though, all this wouldn't be possible. Thankfully, ASUS has stuck to its usual BIOS layout with all the overclocking aspects of the board located under one

dropdown menu, with subsections to tweak without jumping between menus. One useful feature is the ability to see your memory speed as you set it in both linked and unlinked modes. The support of overclocking profiles adds to the BIOS and makes having multiple settings a breeze (and particularly useful when fine-tuning the system for the last 50MHz or less). Another highlight of the board is that should you overclock past stable settings and the machine refuses to POST, you need not clear the CMOS (only under extreme cases), but power off and on again and the system will reset itself to the last stable settings. This means you will not start from the reference clocks, but from the last setting that POSTed - a useful feature that should be on every motherboard from every manufacturer out there. Because of the BIOS, the P5N32-SLI Premium deserves the Premium brand, as it really is an improvement over the previous SLI-Deluxe motherboard.

One aspect of this motherboard that was disappointing, however, was the heat generated by the Northbridge. Granted, the nForce 500 series chipsets were hotter than any others were before and after, but the cooling employed on the P5N32-SLI Premium isn't coping well with the generated heat. The Northbridge was sometimes too hot to touch even with an open chassis. Once another fan was added, though, the temperatures dropped to acceptable levels. This may be a sample-specific problem, but it's something to be aware of should you decide to purchase this board or own one already. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros

- Feature packed motherboard

Cons

- Price
- Old chipset
- Northbridge runs hot

Supplier

Asus SA [011] 783-5450

Internet

www.asus.com

RRP

TBA

Reviewer

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CPU

LGA Pentium 4/Core 2 Series

Chipset

NVIDIA nForce 590 SLI SPP

Memory

Dual-channel DDR2 533/667/800MHz

Storage

1 x FDD, 1 x IDE, 6 x SATA 3Gb/s

Ports and headers

PS/2, 10 x USB 2.0, 8-channel audio, 2 x FireWire

Audio

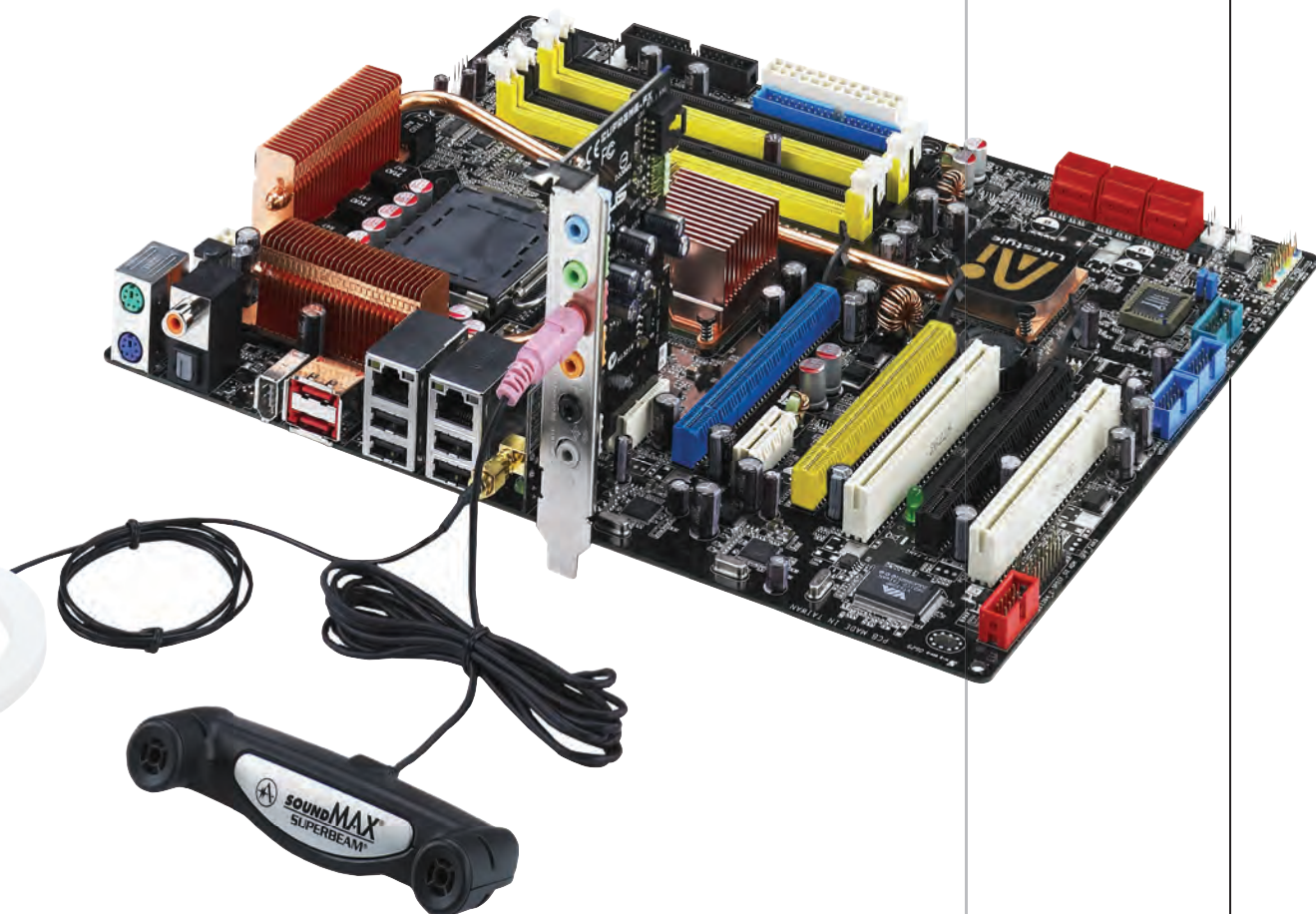
Realtek ALC 885 7.1-channel HD audio

LAN

2 x Gigabit Ethernet

Dimensions

ATX form factor: 30.5cm x 24.5cm



ASUS EXTREME STRIKER

WHEN NEWS OF NVIDIA'S 680i chipset surfaced some time last year, the buzz was that the new chipset would bring the nForce name to the fore after the dismal performance of the nForce500 series. The first 680i-based motherboard, released on 8 November 2006, did manage to break all records for 3DMark2001 SE, 3DMark03, 3DMark05 and 3DMark06. While this was a good showing for the 680i chipset, the enthusiasm was not as great as expected.

ASUS to the rescue then - in the form of its two 680i-based motherboards. We were fortunate enough to get the ASUS Extreme Striker late last year, and we optimistic about it. With a proven chipset and a motherboard aimed squarely at the enthusiast market, the Striker board is exactly what many have been waiting for. The promise of SLI and a high FSB is what the Striker is about. What more could the enthusiast or gamer want from a motherboard? ASUS has thought it fitting to include the Striker in its ROG (Republic Of Gamers) range, as an indication of its abilities; and on paper, the Striker is unmatched.

The package that ASUS has put together for the Striker board is nothing short of impressive. The motherboard is well laid out, with plenty of feature headers for a second IEEE 1394 adapter, an audio riser card, and plenty of SATA (six to be exact) connectors - enough for even the most demanding user. As far as the BIOS goes, everything is where you would expect from an ASUS motherboard. You have all the settings, from VDIMM to VCH, all neatly laid out and easy to read. The ability to save profiles, while not new anymore, is also much appreciated, especially as this board is unlikely to be run at reference settings.

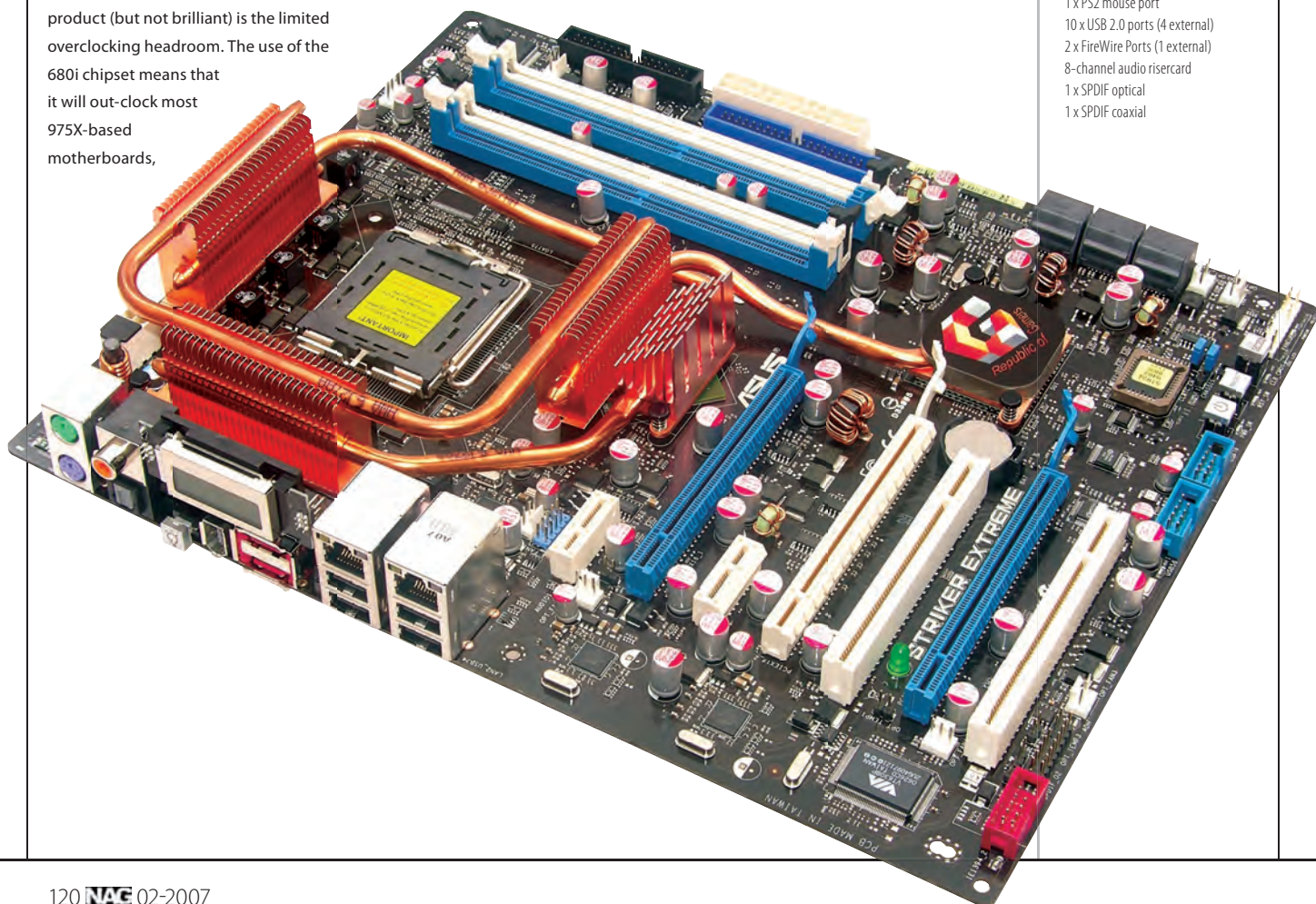
What makes the Striker board an above average product (but not brilliant) is the limited overclocking headroom. The use of the 680i chipset means that it will out-clock most 975X-based motherboards,

which it does. However, by 680i standards it falls short of the mark. Compared to the ASUS P5N32-E SLI, the Striker is an uninspiring overclocker. While the P5N32-E is capable of FSB speeds in excess of 500MHz, the Striker tops out at 420MHz, which makes it a below average product.

This may very well be a BIOS issue, but as it stands, the overclocking ability of the Striker is not up to scratch. Overclocking, though, is not the only thing that makes a motherboard worthy of praise. The Striker excels at almost everything else, in particular how it handles extreme overclocks, not of the motherboard itself, but of the CPU, RAM and anything else that can tolerate its clocks being tweaked. Proof of this is how the Striker Extreme was the base platform for a clean sweep of the South African records in all the benchmarks named earlier. The Striker proved more than capable of delivering, even with an Intel X6800 CPU running at a scorching 4.5GHz - something that other boards failed to do.

The Striker is a board that was designed for perfection, but fell short somewhere during the final stages. Hopefully a BIOS fix or an updated revision will allow it to match the P5N32-E. When, and if, that happens, the Striker Extreme will be amongst the best.

Until such time, however, the price that the Striker retails for is bordering on ridiculous. At an estimated retail price of more than R3,500 it's hard to recommend the Striker over the P5N32-E. Overclocking aside, the Striker Extreme is a good motherboard, if not the best the ROG line has produced thus far. It's well worth a second look for those in the market for a new SLI-capable motherboard. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

Pros

- Handles subzero degree temperatures well
- Good out of the box performance
- Bundle

Cons

- Price
- Low overclocking headroom

Supplier

ASUS SA [011] 783-5450

Internet

www.asus.com

RRP

R3,699

Reviewer

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

Chipset

NVIDIA MCP55 680i SLI Chipset

System Memory

4 DDR2 SDRAM 240-pin DIMM sockets
Supports DDR2 400/533/667/800MHz
64/128-bit dual-channel

Bus Frequency

533/800/1,066/1,333MHz

Expansion Slots

2 x PCI Express x16
1 x PCI Express x8
1 x PCI Express x1
2 x PCI

Connectivity

1 Parallel ATA port supporting 2 IDE drives
8 Serial ATA ports (2 external)
2 x Gigabit Ethernet ports (Marvel PHY)

Expansion Ports

1 x PS2 keyboard port
1 x PS2 mouse port
10 x USB 2.0 ports (4 external)
2 x FireWire Ports (1 external)
8-channel audio riser card
1 x SPDIF optical
1 x SPDIF coaxial

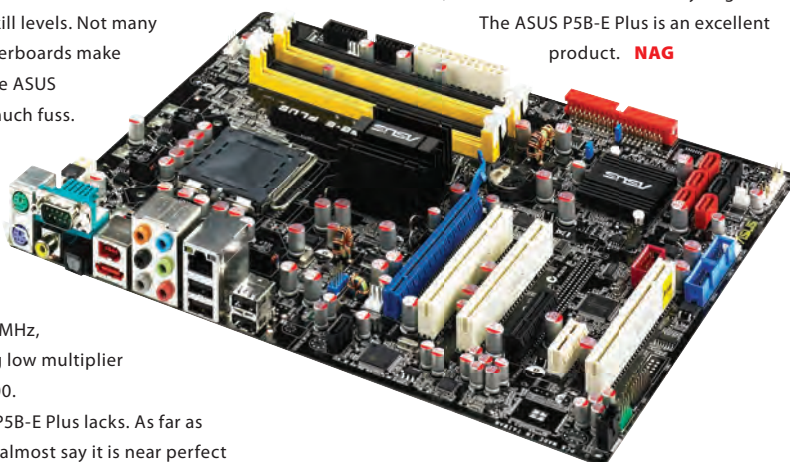
ASUS P5B-E PLUS

OVER THE LAST 18 months, ASUS has had more motherboards in circulation than ever before. At any given time, ASUS had at least three motherboards based on the same chipset, varying in the amount of PCI/PCI-E slots, SATA connectors and the like, with the premium brand usually carrying a hefty price tag. Occasionally, though, ASUS brings a gem to the industry at an unusually low price. One such gem is the ASUS P5B-E Plus. Granted, it is not CrossFire- or SLI-capable, but it's a feature rich motherboard, packed with everything one needs to build a high-end system. The BIOS options, while not of the ROG (Republic Of Gamers) standard, are good enough to allow the newbie as well as the veteran to clock to their respective skill levels. Not many Core 2 Duo supporting motherboards make the 500MHz FSB mark, but the ASUS P5B-E Plus does so without much fuss. Granted, at 500MHz the board isn't suitable for 24/7 operation, but it will allow hours of benchmarking. For 24-hour operation, though, the motherboard is stable at 480MHz, which is great for those using low multiplier CPUs like the E6300 and E6400.

There isn't much that the P5B-E Plus lacks. As far as motherboards go, one could almost say it is near perfect

for the price. Obviously, however, there are things that fall short of making this the perfect motherboard. One of the areas where the ASUS P5B-E Plus performed worse than expected was the under-volting that we experienced at voltages greater than the reference voltages. Setting 1.6V in the BIOS only resulted in 1.48-1.5V, which meant that we had to set much higher voltages to get the board stable. Having said that, though, it was impressive that the motherboard didn't need any Northbridge voltage adjustments to reach the 400MHz mark. If you aren't interested in a multi-graphics setup but want all the functionality offered by a high-end board, then the P5B-E Plus is the way to go.

The ASUS P5B-E Plus is an excellent product. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

Pros

- Overclocking
- Clean layout
- Price

Cons

- Only one PCI-E slot

Supplier

ASUS SA [011] 783-5450

Internet

www.asus.com

RRP

TBA

Reviewer

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

Chipset

Intel P965 Express Chipset
Intel P965 Northbridge

System Memory

4 DDR2 SDRAM 240-pin DIMM sockets
Supports DDR2 400/533/667/800MHz
64/128-bit dual-channel

Bus Frequency

533/800/1,066MHz

Expansion Slots

1 x PCI Express x16, 1 x PCI Express x4, 1 x PCI Express x1, 3 x PCI

Connectivity

1 x Parallel ATA port supporting 2 IDE drives, 7 x Serial ATA ports, 1 x eSATA port
1 x Gigabit Ethernet port

Expansion Ports

1 x PS2 keyboard port, 1 x PS2 mouse port, 10 x USB 2.0 ports, 1 x Serial port, 2 x FireWire ports, 6 x Stereo audio ports, 1 x SPDIF RCA port

MSI G965MD0

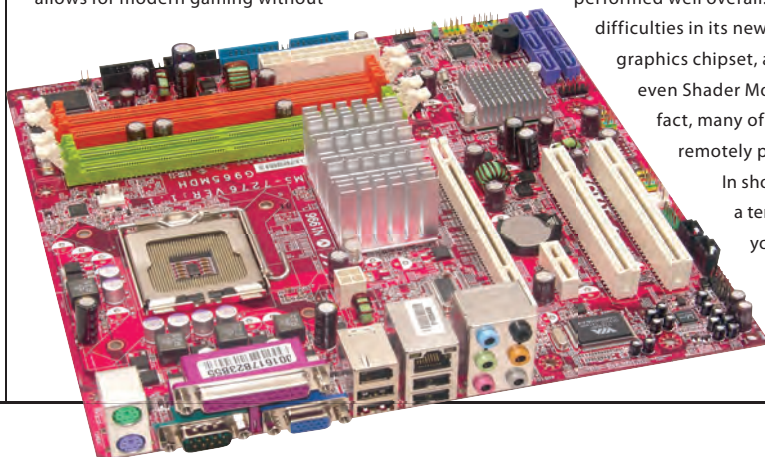
WHEN THE CORE 2 Duo and 965-chipset combination first launched, Intel announced that it also had G965 platforms available with all-new integrated Intel GMA X3000 graphics chipsets. However, it took a couple of months for any such units to appear. The Core 2 Duo processor and platform combination has been targeted at high-end users, with innumerable reports praising the combination highly for its outright performance, fuelling demands from power users and PC enthusiasts. Why make a concerted push into more reasonable value points when this lucrative avenue is still responding so strongly, after all?

Well, now that demand has settled to a mild roar, we're starting to see the G965 chipset hitting retail shelves. On test here, we have the MSI G965MD0, and we're interested to discover if the new integrated graphics chipset really allows for modern gaming without

a dedicated GPU. The MSI has all the features you'd need from a modern board, including six SATA 3Gb/s ports, a 16x PEG slot, and support for DDR2 as well as, of course, the Intel Core 2 Duo CPU. Connectivity comes in the form of an integrated GbE port, and there's built-in 7.1-channel HD audio to boot. Despite being a microATX form factor, the MSI is very well laid out, with nothing blocking anything else. However, that's just about where the good news ends for gamers...

The IDE foibles of the 965 series are well known, but this offering was particularly strange. The BIOS detected any drives connected to the single IDE channel as USB-based storage devices. Although you can boot from USB devices, it is tricky to get Windows XP to install on one. With a SATA drive plugged in and a fresh OS installed, the machine performed well overall. The 965 chipset clearly has no difficulties in its new incarnation. However, the GMA X3000 graphics chipset, although supporting DX 9.0c and even Shader Model 3.0, won't blow your socks off. In fact, many of the newest games will run, but aren't remotely playable even at low detail settings...

In short, the G965 is only really useful as a temporary stopgap between buying your new Core 2 Duo rig and adding a decent 3D card. It'll run games, and older games will even perform quite adequately, but it goes no further. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

Pros

- Affordable Core 2 Duo entry point

Cons

- 3D accelerator not exactly a gaming solution

Supplier

Pinnacle Micro [011] 265-3000

Internet

www.pinnacle.co.za

RRP

R1,649

Reviewer

Russell Bennett

SPECS

Chipset

Intel G965

CPUs supported

Any Intel LGA775 including Core 2 Duo

Front Side Bus (FSB)

533/800/1,066MHz

Memory supported

DDR2 533/667/800MHz (dual-channel)

Expansion

1 x PEG 16x slot, 1 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI v2.3

Storage channels

6 x SATA 3Gb/s, 1 x IDE, 1 x FDD

Networking

Integrated Gigabit Ethernet (Intel Pro)

Audio codes

HD 7.1

AMD ATHLON X2 5200+

WHEN AMD LAUNCHED THE Athlon64, it led the competition by miles. Despite its rivals' best efforts, the architectural advantage AMD had made sure that clock speeds were not enough to dethrone the Athlon64 as the most powerful consumer level processor out there.

However, this all changed when Intel eventually decided to give up on the Pentium brand and usher in a new approach to power, one similar to AMD's, but much more potent. That is where we are right now, and as it stands AMD is once again playing a secondary role to the biggest semi-conductor company in the world.

AMD has been fighting back to take the lead again, and it has done this in two ways: by reducing pricing on its CPUs; and by doing what one would have thought unlikely just a few years ago. Yes, AMD is increasing clock speeds and at present is clocking in at similar speeds to its rivals. Next year, AMD will introduce its first 3GHz part in the form of the Athlon 64 X2 6000+. This CPU promises some competitive performance out of the box, but it's still based on the 90nm process (in particular the Windsor core).

In the meantime, AMD has released the Athlon 64 X2 5200+, also based on the Windsor core.

Performance wise, the 5200+ is an FX-60 in disguise. There's no doubt that the FX-60 is still a very capable CPU, but it's ridiculously expensive. The 5200+ is less than half the price of the FX-60.

Running through the typical benchmarks, the 5200+ put in numbers slightly better than those of the FX-60, but hardly enough to justify a change to the CPU if you are

fortunate enough to own an FX-60. As should be expected, the overclocking abilities of the Windsor core CPUs are not spectacular and this is true for the 5200+. For a CPU that is clocked at 2.6GHz, an overclock to 2.9GHz cannot be considered impressive. Granted, the summer heat may influence the overclocking headroom, but it is still disappointing that the magical (at least for AMD) 3GHz barrier could not be broken using air-cooling. At 2.9GHz, though, the memory bandwidth calculated by Sisoft's Sandra 2007 is impressive, indicating a throughput of 9.6GB/sec using DDR800 memory at 1T.

Where the Athlon X2 5200+ does excel is in general use, such as performing a number of tasks, be it browsing multiple Websites while burning a DVD, listening to music or watching a video.

Even when playing the odd game, one would be hard pressed to notice the difference in gameplay, as framerates are consistently above comfortable at the typical user settings of 1,280 x 1,024. With that said, we can't help but feel that this is a little too late by AMD. The bottom line is that, while this CPU will in no way be the subject of discussion (much like the FX or Extreme series), it is more than capable of powering today's graphics cards and their related applications. Whether that holds true for the next generation of graphics cards will remain to be seen, but for now, this CPU provides good value at a reasonable price. This is something that has been missing from AMD for some time, and it's great to see such a favourable price/performance product from the company despite the offbeat timing of the release. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros

- Essentially an FX-60 at a more attractive price point

Cons

- Still hammered by Core 2 Duo

Supplier

Legend Memory [011] 314-0817

Internet

www.legendmemory.com

RRP

R4,190

Reviewer

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

Socket type

AM2

Stock clock speed

2.6GHz

Architecture

Dual-core, Windsor

Cache

128KB L1 per core, 1MB L2 per core

Manufacturing process

90nm

TDP

89W



CREATIVE LABS X-FI FATAL1TY FPS

THERE ARE A NUMBER of subsystems that we take for granted today. As technology and the art of miniaturising components have advanced, manufacturers have stacked more and more components onto the motherboard itself, turning these solutions into pure commodities. However, of the three most common subsystems (we won't discuss built-in storage subsystems here), we have different points of view as to how effective the integrated hardware actually is. We're talking, of course, about graphics, audio, and networking.

Almost any modern motherboard has at least one, if not two, GbE ports. These are generally considered adequate for the needs of the conventional user as well as the gamer, although dedicated NICs can do all sorts of impressive things like TCP-IP offloading, providing advanced network services, and automatically load balancing a connection (this is for enterprise IT deployment and seldom necessary if your machine is for playing the latest games). An integrated graphics chip, on the other hand, is invariably a poor solution. To include high-end 3D accelerators on the motherboard itself would be extremely expensive and cause all sorts of problems that manufacturers don't want to have to deal with. Therefore, if you try gaming with an integrated graphics solution, well, it just won't be the same kind of experience really as there'll be so much potential left in the titles waiting for your hardware to exploit. A standalone graphics board is the only solution, and a necessity for any gaming rig.

It may be less in your face than the visuals, but for the most immersive gaming experience possible, you really need to think about the audio system you utilise. The Creative SoundBlaster X-Fi Fatal1ty FPS, on test here, is without a doubt a step up in quality compared to an integrated audio solution. Compared to HD audio hardware, generally a Realtek solution, the X-Fi steps it up to a completely new level, really. Now, this isn't necessarily the undeniably questionable benefit of fitting this sound card with 64MB of its own dedicated X-RAM helping your machine run faster while gaming, nor is it the neat and nicely built 5.25-inch

breakout box the card comes with.

It is, however, in the EAX 5.0 support. EAX might be a proprietary, and in many technical circles disliked, rules subset for producing crystal clear soundtracks complete with positional audio generation, but it is the surround sound standard most commonly found in gaming titles. Everything supports EAX, so to get the most out of your games your hardware needs to as well. Sure, the HD audio will play 5.1 and higher given the corresponding speaker sets, but the games you run won't be able to take specific advantage of this to deepen your experience. This is precisely what EAX is for – as the logos suggest, it's the equivalent of the DTS standard for games.

That said, there aren't too many titles available as yet that even support EAX 4.0 by default, so EAX 5 is even scarcer. The rapid evolution from the older EAX 2.0 of the SB Live! days to the latest incarnation has left many developers questioning the value of the move. Being in the commanding position of being the standard setter in its market, Creative will fuel further adoption of the more advanced audio standards through support that is more widespread. Even more than these specific extensions, what the SB X-Fi delivers is superior immersion in any virtual environment through the sheer quality difference of the samples and soundtracks being reproduced. The X-Fi has absolutely no crackling in feedback. Major and minor audio channels ebb and flow seamlessly to create a rich and complex audible experience for the gamer to immerse him or herself in. Audible details you've never noticed in games before come out sharply, the direction from which sounds are coming is much more vivid and natural, and the clarity of individual sounds and sound channels convinces you more powerfully than ever.

Were it not for the price, we'd have to say that every gamer should own an X-Fi, just like everyone should upgrade from onboard graphics. The X-Fi's true HD audio generation capabilities are so far ahead of onboard Realtek chips that the two can't even be compared. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

- Fabulous audio reproduction
- Gaming-specific bonuses like EAX 5

■ Cons

- Price

■ Supplier

Rectron [011] 203-1000

■ Internet

www.rectron.co.za

■ RRP

R2,999

■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

SPECS

■ Hardware Features

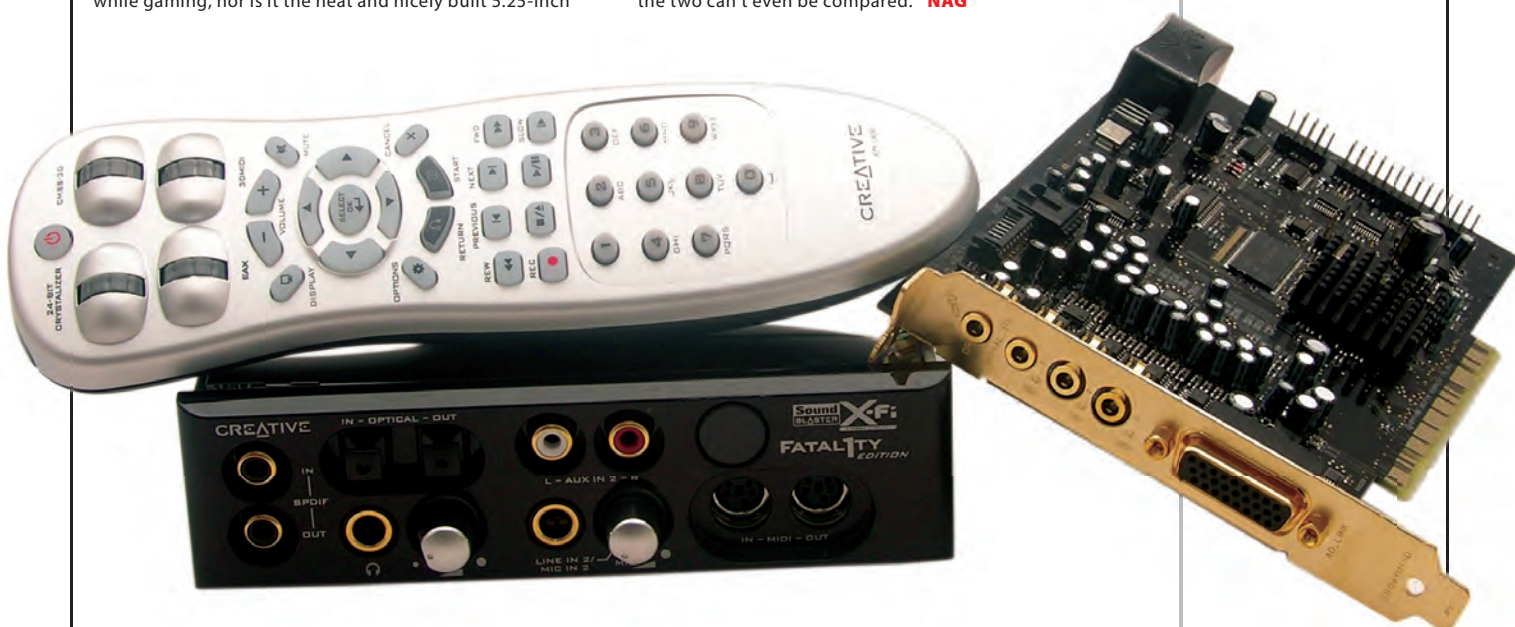
109dB SNR DAC quality on all channels
64MB X-RAM (Xtreme Fidelity RAM)
THX certified quality
Extended I/O via internal drive-bay module
Bundled, full-feature IR remote

■ Card Connectivity

FlexiJack (performing a 3-in-1 function: digital in/line in/microphone) via 3.5mm mini-jack
Line level out (front/rear/centre/sub-woofer) via 3 x 3.5mm mini-jacks
AUX-IN line-level analogue input via 4-pin Molex connector
26-pin AD-Link connector for linking to the X-Fi I/O Console (upgrade option)

■ I/O Drive Connectivity

2 x RCA jacks for coaxial SPDIF input and output
2 x RCA jacks for Auxiliary input
2 x optical connectors for optical SPDIF input and output
2 x mini MIDI female connectors for MIDI input and output
Headphone output via 6.35mm (1/4-inch) stereo jack
Headphone volume control knob
Shared line-level analogue Line/Microphone input via 6.35mm (1/4-inch) stereo jack



COOLLABORATORY METALPADS

LAST YEAR, WE LOOKED at an all-new type of thermal paste called Liquid Metal Pro from tiny German operation CoolLaboratory. Not only was it an absolutely unique concoction for use as thermal paste, but it also turned out to be (by some margin) the best thermal paste we had ever tried! There were a couple of issues however. The liquid metal was only available by ordering directly from CoolLaboratory. The costs of the product and shipping were fairly reasonable provided you had a credit card to transact with, but the good news is that we now have our own SA provider of CoolLaboratory products in the form of Justis Saayman of Truevision Group.

Then there was the container in which it shipped. You see, no retail store would ever stock a syringe filled with a silvery liquid on its shelves, where both young and old could lay hands on the item, for fear of lawsuits. Liquid Metal Pro would likely kill anyone who accidentally, or just foolishly, injected the compound into his or her body, and despite the fact that the needle of the syringe was too short to inject Liquid Metal into the bloodstream itself, well, it remained a definite no-no... For this reason, the company has come up with an all-new Liquid Metal product. This ships in the form of square pads of tinfoil-like material, which are placed between the CPU (or GPU) being treated and their cooler blocks, rather than being squirted from a syringe and painted on. Great idea, now let's see if it actually worked.

Frankly, we found placing the Liquid Metal pads to be much more of a challenge than painting the surface of the block. The pads kept slipping out as we turned the machine upright! Nevertheless, the Liquid Metal pads don't remain separate from the surface of the chosen cooler for long. Simply start the machine up with the pad in place and run for 30 minutes or so,

and the ensuing temperatures will have melted the substance enough for it to fuse with the cooler itself. Before getting to this step, however, you need to trim the silvery squares to fit your CPU. Our chip, being an LGA775 configuration, required that the pads be smaller than the size at which they ship, which would be ideal for AMD processors. Fortunately, the company provides a useful little stencil for ensuring that you cut the material to the correct dimensions first time without having to physically measure yourself.

We ran the Liquid Metal pads on a CPU with some serious temperature issues, our Intel 955 Extreme Edition. At 3.43GHz per core, it remains the highest-clocked dual-core CPU in the world. At these stock frequencies, the chip would idle at 48°C under our Arctic Cooling Freezer 7 Pro HSF using 'regular' thermal grease.

With Liquid Metal Pro, the CPU temperature plummeted to a far more pleasing 38°C degrees (as we expected)! On top of this commanding cooling performance, the package we received was also quite good value. You'll be able to get a three-pack like this for R120 from Truevision. Depending on your needs, you can apply the packs to either your CPU or GPU. The pack also includes a useful little cleaning kit for removing old grease from the cooler block. Single pads will cost R70, so this package is the way to go. Of course, the older syringes retail at around the same price and contain enough Liquid Metal for several applications, but then you have to find your own cleaner and be brave enough to paint the substance onto your cooler yourself...

The thermal headroom these pads deliver allowed the 955XE to be clocked up to 4.3GHz, still using air-cooling, and it remained within safe operating temperatures. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

- The best heat paste available

■ Cons

- Tricky to place at first

■ Supplier

Truevision Group

■ Internet

justis@truevision.co.za

■ RRP

R120

■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

SPECS

■ In Detail

The clear blister pack contains three MetalPads suitable for installation on both CPUs and GPUs. Installation on an air-cooled system is straightforward, but water coolers are slightly trickier, as these coolers don't reach the temperatures required by the pad to melt and fuse with the surface. In this case, the manufacturer recommends disabling the water pump for long enough to reach the required temperature levels.





VANTEC ICEBERQ 6

WITH ALMOST EVERY AIB encouraging overclocking in some way or another, aftermarket cooling for graphics cards has never been more important. With overclocked RAM and core speeds resulting in more heat and a higher probability of failure, many are taking to aftermarket cooling to keep temperatures within safe ranges. This is the aim with the Vantec Iceberg 6.

The unit is rather large and will turn any graphics card into a two-slot board. This may have been an issue in the past, but it's not anymore, as motherboard manufacturers have become wiser and realised that 3cm of space between PCI-E 16x slots is not a workable area.

At its core, the Iceberg 6 features a pure copper block no bigger than the actual GPU footprint. This block is half an inch thick and heavy (probably accounting for most of the unit's weight). As heavy as it is, it's not enough to crush the core like other aftermarket coolers that make use of a spring mechanism to mount. Attached to the copper block is another copper slab with copper fins, all of which is put together with a good degree of attention. The unit feels solid and is not likely to break. The plastic that surrounds this copper mould, though, is not of the best quality. It feels cheap and flimsy, but manages to hold the unit together without falling to pieces.

Instead of the fan being mounted on top of the heatsink, it is located on the side blowing air into the fins from the front to the back. Given the space constraints, this method works better than a traditional flower layout, which to be effective would need a larger fan. The fan itself is a 45mm x 15mm ball bearing unit, which spins at 2,700rpm and generates a measly 20.9dB - hardly enough noise to be aware of. In fact, during testing we had to double check twice that the fan was actually functioning.

While not up to the standards of other high-end units, it does come in a lot cheaper, which gives it a better price/performance ratio than many other competing units. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros

- Performance

Cons

- Not the best out there
- Build quality

Supplier

Frontosa [011] 466-0038

Internet

www.frontosa.co.za

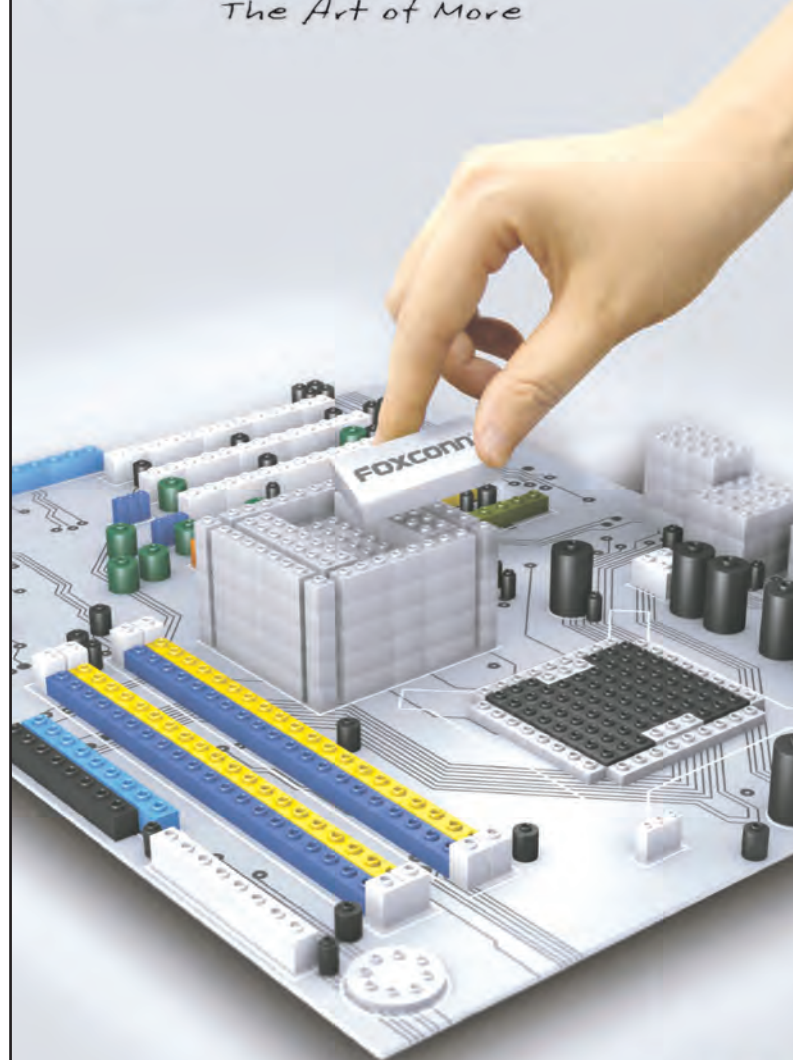
RRP

R350

Reviewer

Neo Sibeko

FOXCONN[®]
The Art of More



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Game On - Anywhere!

ASUS notebooks with advanced graphics solutions and exclusive display technologies offer the freedom to play game anywhere



Tired of the same old portable games that are simply not challenging enough but true-to-life games can only be played sitting squarely at your desk? Think again.

Notebook is now the new choice that allows users to bring the battlefield anywhere they go! Armed with the latest platform and advanced graphic solution, notebooks are starting to be the preferred game machine even for some of the most avid gamers. Mobility is the key that offers users the wire-free gaming experience that opens up a new way to play. Gamers can now sit in a caf   enjoying a cup of fresh brew while advancing on the latest game title - with the rest of the teammates located all over the world!

To make the mobile gaming experience live up to the expectations, a good notebook is essential and as the host of the first notebook gaming tournament ever held in the history of ESWC, ASUS notebook is definitely your best partner in game!

Ultimate Gaming Experience

ASUS notebooks' advanced computing performance and graphics display technology are well recognized by gamers worldwide. Recently, ASUS made appearances in several of the world's biggest electronic sports tournaments. At the Electronic Sport World Cup (ESWC) grand final in Paris this year, ASUS Notebook has delegated as "Official ESWC Notebook" to introduce the world of notebook gaming to gamers with the current hit Counter Strike - Source. The revolutionary event received a large number of participants and successfully generated an enthusiastic buzz in the gaming society. ASUS notebook was also named the official notebook in the world series of World GameMaster Tournament (WGT).



100 best ESWC gamer champions from worldwide to compete on ASUS gaming notebook

Words From the Best

During the ESWC, many professional gamers were keen on the notebook gaming idea. Comparing to desktop PCs, notebooks excel with high mobility that allows users to incorporate gaming into many aspects of the daily life.

Shiddy and Odie are winners of the ASUS Notebook Trophy. When asked to comment on their notebook gaming venture, they were both positive about the overall experience.

"Notebooks are getting more powerful in terms of structure reliability, system stability and feature extensiveness. And the best thing is we'll be able to bring the game on anywhere - even outdoors and that's brilliant!"

"Based on the latest platform and equipped with many exclusive features, the ASUS notebooks deliver seamless graphics presentation with realistic audio effect on the go," said Ronan, the champion of the ASUS Notebook Trophy. "I'm happy to have another gaming device that plays even the latest 3D-intense titles while being compact enough to bring around."

Indeed, with the option to game on a notebook, gaming will no longer be an isolated activity that requires a dedicated time slot at a fixed location. Gamers can now enjoy an adrenalin-pumping session with wireless freedom anytime, anywhere.



Best gamers for Notebook version gaming tournament
"Counter Strike: Source": "Ronan" (Germany), "Shiddy" (Germany), "Odie" (Germany), and NewBOOr (France)

Official ESWC Notebook ASUS G1P Series

Based on the latest Intel Centrino Duo Mobile Technology with advanced graphic solutions, the G1P gaming notebook revolutionizes the way games are played with blistering speed and true-to-life video and audio performances - on the go! The 15.4" wide aspect visual feast presents with design details incorporated to elevate the overall experience, including an OLED instant display, side/front speakers, hotkey highlights as well as sidelights.



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NAG 8800 SERIES ROUNDUP

AS WE'VE MENTIONED IN PREVIOUS ISSUES, THE GEFORCE 8 IS THE BIGGEST THING TO HIT GAMING IN A LONG TIME - PROBABLY ABOUT AS BIG AS THE VOOOOO2, AND THAT'S NO EXAGGERATION. THEREFORE, WE EXPECT MANY OF OUR READERS WILL LIKELY BE SALIVATING OVER ONE OF THESE CARDS, AND POTENTIALLY BUYING ONE SOMETIME SOON. WE ROUNDED UP THE GEFORCE 8 CARDS WE COULD FIND, AND PUT THEM HEAD TO HEAD.

THIS ISN'T A BENCHMARK FEST. IN FACT, THERE ARE NO BENCHMARKS AT ALL THIS TIME. WHY? BECAUSE, FOR NOW, ALL THE 8800 CARDS ARE ESSENTIALLY REFERENCE DESIGNS. COMPANIES HAVEN'T STARTED TO DIFFERENTIATE YET BECAUSE THE PRODUCT IS SO NEW. BENCHMARKS WOULD JUST BE A SERIES OF GRAPHS WITH INSIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES, OF ALMOST NO VALUE TO ANYONE.

THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCES WE SEE RIGHT NOW SHOWS IN THE QUALITY OF ASSEMBLY AND THE BUNDLED EXTRAS THAT COME WITH EACH CARD. WE CAN SEE THE FORMER IN OVERCLOCKING TESTS, AND THE LATTER BY OPENING THE BOX AND RUMMAGING THROUGH IT FOR GOODIES. WE'VE DONE BOTH, AND HERE ARE THE RESULTS FOR THE CARDS.

ASUS EN8800GTX

Price: TBA | **Supplier:** Axiz/Corex

ASUS's 8800GTX is often considered the golden standard of the series. This is because ASUS did the reference board design for NVIDIA, so at this point virtually all the cards are based on this design. We found that ASUS's offering had pretty good overclocking numbers, and we were able to get it running stable at a 630MHz core and a 2,050MHz memory clock. This gave a pretty good boost in the few places we could see it.

ASUS bundles *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter* and *GTI Racing* with the card. Also bundled with the card is a DVI to VGA converter, a Molex to PCI Express power converter, and a video-out cable that seems to only support component cables. While component is a good choice for HDTV, many users with regular sets expecting S-video may be out of luck. There's also some kind of CD wallet included, which is a rather odd choice for a bundle item. ASUS's box is quite big, and follows the now popular white box inside a printed sleeve design many manufacturers use. It also has a handle at the top.



ASUS EN8800GTS

Price: R5,699 | **Supplier:** Axiz/Corex

The 8800GTS from ASUS is virtually identical to the 8800GTX, except that it's a GTS. For those who may have missed our previous 8800 article, this means it has 640MB of RAM on a 320-bit bus instead of the 768MB of RAM on a 384-bit bus that the GTX supports. It also has 96 internal shader pipelines compared to the 128 of the GTX. It's also clocked lower, with a default of 500/1,600MHz instead of 575/1,800MHz. However, this doesn't make as much of a speed difference as one might think. We were able to get to a 620MHz core and 1,900MHz memory, which is pretty good.

The GTS's bundle is almost identical to the GTX bundle. We had expected to see more PCI power converters in the GTS box, but there was only one. Everything else is identical too; both games are still there, as is the odd fake leather CD wallet. The box is also identical in size, i.e. huge. This leaves ample room for padding, but we're wondering if the box size is part of the marketing aspect. It certainly makes it seem like you're buying a big important product, which, given the price of the 8800 series cards right now, you pretty much are.



MSI N8800GTX-T2D768E-HD

Price: TBA | **Supplier:** Pinnacle Micro

MSI only managed to send us one card sample, the GTX version. We actually had it very early, as MSI brought it in from Taipei for us, and we got to spend a lot of time with this card exploring its limits. It turned out to be the best overclocker of the bunch, reaching a 650MHz core and 2,260MHz memory clock. Despite the second best core speed, having by far the highest memory clock more than makes up for it, and this much power is more than most systems will be able to handle. You'll want a CPU upgrade to go along with this card, like most of the GTXs.

MSI's bundle is quite nice as well. MSI didn't go for the extremely common G.R.A.W. as the game bundle, and instead opted for *Serious Sam II*. While not really the latest or most popular game, it's still pretty good at showing off what a high-end card can do if you crank the resolution and features like HDR. It's also a fun game and is fairly underrated in our opinion. The hardware part of the bundle includes two DVI to VGA converters, a cable that supports both component and S-video for TV-out, and what looks to be a separate 4-pin S-video cable. There's also a PCI-E power converter, which is pretty much mandatory for a GTX anyway, since few power supplies currently have two PCI-E power connectors, though that will likely change.



LEADTEK WINFAST PX8800GTX-TDH

Price: R6,834 | **Supplier:** Corex

Leadtek is the other brand that we were only able to obtain a GTX sample from, and not a GTS. This card was hot on the heels of the MSI in the overclocking tests. It actually has a higher core speed (660MHz) than the MSI, but the slightly slower 2,100MHz peak for the memory clock relegated it to second place. This is still an extremely good overclock, as anything over 2GHz seems to be difficult to achieve on most of the latest graphics cards.

Where Leadtek really shines, though, is in the bundle, which is pretty much the best of the bunch in this roundup. The bundled games are *Spellforce 2* and *Trackmania Nations*, which isn't all that amazing, but the rest makes up for it. The bundle also includes PowerDVD 6, a TV-out cable (which can do component), S-video, and composite RCA using the green line of the component cable (which is quite surprising). There's a DVI to VGA converter, and this was the only card to come with two PCI-E power converters, which will be very useful for those using older power supplies. There's also a comprehensive manual, which is a rare sight these days. We did actually go through it, and found that this card supports HDTV over DVI, which will definitely be a plus for HDTV owners. The box design was also quite good, much sturdier than the average and with no annoying sleeve around an unmarked box - it's an actual box for a change.



XFX 8800GTX PV-T80F-SHF9

Price: R6,999 | **Supplier:** Axiz

The distinctive green XFX boxes also made an appearance for our roundup. Local distributor Axiz apparently went to great pains to get us some samples briefly before needing them to be somewhere else by the end of the year. We would have preferred a bit more time with these cards, but we didn't have the option. Thus, they jumped the queue a bit in the review so we would have enough time to do proper overclocking tests. Unfortunately, the results of said tests were somewhat disappointing. The GTX version only made 610MHz core and 2,000MHz memory speeds, coming in quite a bit behind the competition. We couldn't find any specific reason for this card to have issues, so it's probably just down to the quality of assembly and components used on the board. It's not a bad overclock really, but compared to the other results it falls short.

XFX's bundle is also quite Spartan in comparison. The box is compact, and stuffed with the usual dark foam XFX likes to use. The bundle contains no games at all, which isn't really so bad, as most bundled games are either old games people usually have, or second-rate titles. The bundle includes TV-out cables (separate cables for component and S-video), two DVI to VGA converters, and no PCI-E power converters at all. The manual is a one-page quick setup guide.



XFX 8800GTS PV-T80G-THF9

Price: R5,499 | **Supplier:** Axiz

XFX also sent us a GTS part, which was virtually indistinguishable from the GTX other than by the card inside it. Until we tested the GTS, there was some speculation that the GTX card from XFX was just a fluke, as both bad and good overclocking samples do randomly appear. However, the GTS part seemed to indicate the opposite. At a 590MHz core and 1,900MHz memory, it's the slowest clocked card in the test. The fact that both XFX cards are bad overclockers seems to indicate that there may be a quality problem in XFX's assembly line. However, two samples are not enough to definitively state that. Nevertheless, we were disappointed by this card's potential.

The bundle is also identical to the other XFX offering. This isn't really unexpected, as most manufacturers save costs by reusing the same packaging design for similar products.



SPARKLE GEFORCE 8800GTX

Price: R7,699 | **Supplier:** Eurobyte

Sparkle isn't a well-known brand, but that doesn't mean it is a new or inexperienced player in the world of graphics cards. Sparkle's GTX entry did quite well, with 640MHz core and 2,100MHz memory clocks. This put it ahead of the ASUS standard, but behind Leadtek and MSI. Still, not a bad place to be, and if the card is priced lower due to the lack of brand recognition, it could be worth considering.

Sparkle's bundle is average. The bundled game is *Call of Duty 2*, which is a great game, but not exactly a next-generation tour de force in terms of graphics. It's also one that many gamers may already have played long ago. The bundle doesn't include any DVI to VGA converters, which isn't a huge loss, but it does have two PCI-E power converters, so there's no need to go hunting one down regardless of what power supply you have. It also includes a component and S-video output cable and a quick start guide.



SPARKLE GEFORCE 8800GTS

Price: r5,899 | **Supplier:** Eurobyte

This card was the real surprise of the bunch. One might not expect a Sparkle 8800GTS to be the excitement of a high-end card roundup. However, this card was by far the most impressive overclocker we saw, reaching 660MHz core and 2,020MHz memory speeds. This would be impressive even on a GTX, but on a GTS it's jaw dropping. When fully overclocked, it easily goes toe to toe with a standard clocked GTX part, and obviously costs significantly less. This may just be an example of the 'golden sample' effect. Every batch of processors has one or two exceptional candidates that perform far above specifications. We may just have tripped over a diamond in the rough with this one specific sample of the card. Still, if this kind of overclocking performance were consistent, this would be the card we'd be telling everyone to buy, as it's the best value. Unfortunately, we'd need a big batch of identical cards from Sparkle to confirm that this one is not just a statistical fluke.

The GTS's bundle is much the same as the GTX's. The only real difference here is that there's one PCI-E power converter instead of two, which makes sense. Sparkle's box design is also quite modest, and looks a bit more like a box you'd find a game in rather than a piece of hardware. It's certainly a far cry from the bulky behemoth that ASUS ships its parts in, so if you're looking to impress people with boxes, look elsewhere. However, if you're looking for a good graphics card, this wouldn't be a bad place to start.



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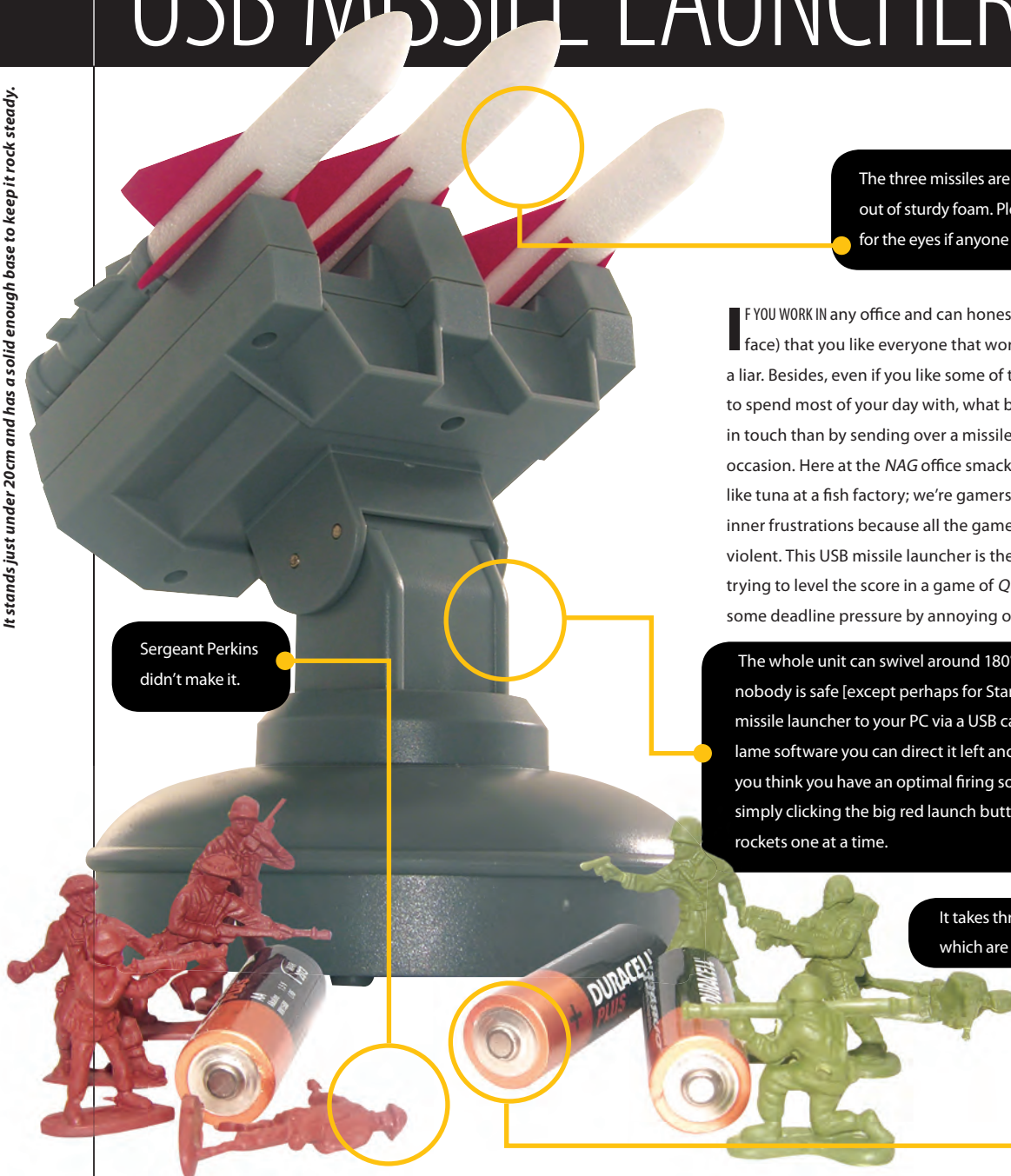
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LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

USB MISSILE LAUNCHER

It stands just under 20cm and has a solid enough base to keep it rock steady.



The three missiles are spring loaded and made out of sturdy foam. Please remember not to aim for the eyes if anyone is watching you.

Sergeant Perkins didn't make it.

IF YOU WORK in any office and can honestly say (with a straight face) that you like everyone that works with you, then you're a liar. Besides, even if you like some of the people you're forced to spend most of your day with, what better way of keeping in touch than by sending over a missile or three on the odd occasion. Here at the NAG office smack talk and insults fly around like tuna at a fish factory; we're gamers and need to take out our inner frustrations because all the games we play are making us violent. This USB missile launcher is the perfect distraction when trying to level the score in a game of *Quake* or to just relieve some deadline pressure by annoying other innocent people.

The whole unit can swivel around 180° and pivot up 45° ensuring nobody is safe [except perhaps for Stan in accounts]. Connect the missile launcher to your PC via a USB cable and using the rather lame software you can direct it left and right, up and down until you think you have an optimal firing solution. The next step is simply clicking the big red launch button repeatedly to fire the rockets one at a time.

It takes three AA batteries which are not included.

www.thinkgeek.com

If you're a gadget person and don't mind spending the exorbitant shipping costs from the USA, this is definitely a site you'll want to visit around Christmas time. They have everything from plush microbes to miniature remote-controlled helicopters and their customer service, speed of delivery and easy of use is a step beyond anything else you'll encounter online or anywhere else for that matter.

Product update: Even as the ink dries on

thinkgeek.com

Think Gee

this page a newer version of this product is available at www.thinkgeek.com, with twice the power and triple the fun.

Disclaimer: Shooting your missile at someone in the office might land you with a sexual harassment charge.



The software that comes with the missile launcher is laughable, even Excel looks more exciting. At least it works, but hey, that's no excuse.

In the March issue Group Test: We test seven of the latest Smartphones now available in SA

Hardware Reviews: BenQ 37" LCD TV / Sahara Quad Core PC
LG 7" swivel LCD portable DVD player / Mac Pro
Sony Ericsson K800i / Airlive MIMO-G wireless router

Feature Articles: Implementing mobile e-mail in your organization / What benefits will lead-free component manufacturing have on our environment? / Ten buying tips for purchasing a network surveillance camera / The International Consumer Electronics Show is the worlds largest trade show for consumer technology - we take a look at what hot products were unveiled at CES in Las Vegas in January

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WSVG, CPL HOST BACK TO BACK CHAMPIONSHIPS

IN TWO BREATHTAKING WEEKS, the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) and the World Series of Video Games (WSVG) held their respective championship finals. The two organisations have been in direct competition since the cancellation of the CPL World Tour earlier last year. Intel, the CPL's leading sponsor, ended its partnership in favour of a new arrangement with the WSVG. The CPL then rallied towards the end of the year with a new venture, the World Season, backed by AMD.

WSVG

The WSVG finals were the first to commence. Utilising a specially outfitted television studio in New York, and broadcasting the matches live via streaming video, this was certainly the flashier of the two events. The tournament supported multiple gaming disciplines on both PC and console, including *Quake 4*, *Counter-Strike 1.6*, *WarCraft III*, and *Halo 2*. With stringent qualifying requirements in place, only the very best teams and players were eligible to compete.

The main event, *Quake 4*, was won by Sweden's Johan "Toxic" Quick. Due to the WSVG's inconsistent ranking system, the Toxinator, as he has become known, was forced to proceed through the most difficult side of the tournament bracket. He had to face his nemesis, Anton "Cooler" Singov (Russia) in the first round, followed by multiple world champion Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel

(USA), and WCG runner-up Jason "Socrates" Sylka (USA). Nevertheless, in his characteristic machine-like style, Toxic won all of the games in straight maps, securing his place in the grand final.

The lower bracket contender for the grand final turned out to be Fatal1ty yet again, in what would almost be a repeat of his performance at the *Painkiller* finals in 2005. Fatal1ty had gathered impressive momentum, but despite winning the first set convincingly, he was unable to shake the Swede's confidence in the second. Toxic won 2-1, chalking up his eighth consecutive international victory.

The *Counter-Strike 1.6* tournament was unexpectedly won by German team Alternate Attax, who qualified in the first half of the year, but had undergone several crippling roster changes in the intervening months. Nevertheless, the Germans cruised through the event, winning the grand final against America's Team 3D with relative ease. The ever-consistent Swedes from Fnatic came in third.

In *WarCraft III*, the Netherlands' Orc player Manuel "Grubby" Schenkhuizen finally took revenge on South Korean Undead player, Jung-Hee "Sweet" Chun, for his loss in the Blizzard Worldwide Invitational. Sweet had defeated Grubby twice to steal victory, coming from the lower bracket, but this time Grubby succeeded in doing the same. After losing to Sweet in the upper bracket semi-final, he fought his way back through the lower bracket and won 4-1 in the grand final. Grubby's former teammate,

Dae-Hee "Fov" Cho (South Korea), finished third.

CPL

It was immediately clear that the CPL's event was more community-focussed than media-focussed, and the choice of *Quake III* over *Quake 4* marked them as an organisation 'in tune' with the wishes of the players and spectators. For variety's sake, the event also featured a high-stakes *Counter-Strike 1.6* tournament.

While many of the former top *Quake III* players were unable or unwilling to return to the game for this prestigious event, familiar names such as ESWC 2005 winner Anton "Cooler" Singov and runner-up Paul "Czm" Nelson (USA) ensured that the competition would still be spectacular. The two former greats renewed their rivalry in style, with Czm emerging victorious after an epic three-map battle in the semi-finals. With his confidence high, Czm then went on to win the grand final against China's Fan "Jibo" Zhibo, leaving Cooler with a disappointing third place.

As for *Counter-Strike*, Fnatic finally claimed their first major tournament win, after near misses at the Electronic Sports World Cup (where they finished second) and the WSVG finals. Fnatic beat the Norwegians from Meet Your Makers to take first place. The Polish winners of the recent World Cyber Games, Pentagram G-Shock, had to settle for third.

CPL ANNOUNCES SEVERITY

Frustrated with titles such as *Painkiller* and *Quake 4*, which received sub-par support from their respective developers, the Cyberathlete Professional League has decided to develop its own game. *Severity*, as the undertaking is currently called, will make history as the first game created specifically for use in e-sports. Details are still sketchy, but we know it will be a first-person shooter with support for one-versus-one duel play and five-versus-five team play. The CPL has already licensed id Software's *Quake III* engine, and has recruited Tom Mustaine, former studio director of Ritual Entertainment, as the project leader. John Romero, game designer of the original *Quake*, will also be involved in an advisory capacity.

"Severity will be the first videogame conceived from the ground up to ensure the growth and appeal of multiplayer game competitions worldwide," said Mustaine. The CPL plans to rely heavily on community feedback to balance the game's mechanics, and is rumoured to be approaching professional gamers to become full-time staff members.

UBERLAN STRIKES BACK

KwaZulu-Natal's largest LAN returned to the Gateway shopping centre in December 2006. Once again, Uberlan provided an enjoyable multiplayer gaming environment for over

two hundred players and featured the best in competitive gaming the province had to offer. Tournaments were run for *Quake 4*, *Counter-Strike 1.6*, and *WarCraft III: Defense of the Ancients (DotA)*. Uberlan remains the Mecca for South African *DotA* players, offering more regular prize-giving tournaments than anywhere else in the country.

The event was supported by Vodacom, who provided Internet access at the event and covered many essential costs, as well as Axiz and Dimension Data. Managed by Sheri G Promotions, with assistance from well-known *WarCraft III* player and LAN veteran Paul "Vetoll" Fairbank, Uberlan once more proceeded without a hitch.

Without the presence of the Johannesburg *DotA* champions, Durban-based clan 0wn3d triumphed easily, having already achieved two second places in prestigious tournaments this year (the most recent being Rage 2006). Team 42's newest recruit, Mark "Lazarith" Fairbank, proved his value to the team by winning the *Quake 4* tournament, and local team District Six claimed first prize in *Counter-Strike*.

MSSA AWARDS NATIONAL COLOURS TO BF2142 TEAM

Through the combined efforts of the Amateur

Gaming Association of South Africa (AGASA) and EA South Africa, a local online competition was held last year for the newest release in the *Battlefield* series, *BF2142*. The winning team would earn an all-expenses-paid trip to compete in the Asia Pacific finals, held in Taipei, Taiwan.

Advanced Special Forces, a team put together for the tournament by Capetonian Rizaan "Snake182" Lakay, walked away with the grand prize, and was soon preparing to represent South Africa at the finals. As AGASA is an official club registered with Mind Sports South Africa (MSSA), the organisation was pleased to award national colours to each member of the team.

The eight players – Jacques "Zoidberg" Jordaan, Quentin "TygerBS" Hugget, Johan "DeoVante9" Deideriks, Benjamin "Equinox" Greenwood, James "4king_brilliant" Fenton, Ruan "Freako" du Plessis, Barry "Anthrax" Louzada and, of course, Rizaan "Snake182" Lakay – were presented with their South African blazers at the Old Edwardian's Sports Club on the morning of their departure.

"The team is the first PC team to be officially recognised by the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee," said Colin Webster, president of MSSA. "We hope this team will be the first of many." **NAG**

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DO LOCAL GAMERS MATTER TO SGS ANYMORE?

THE MOMENT SOMEONE COMPLAINS about poor service from local game server hosting entity SAIX, they are always met with the same retort from the various zealots who support SAIX blindly: don't complain about a free service.

However, considering the circumstances surrounding the ill-fated *F.E.A.R.* servers on SAIX, we believe it well within our right to complain loudly and vehemently about the horrific job SAIX is doing. However, we will only do it once and then never again - no point in preaching to the choir, after all.

Recently, the SAIX *F.E.A.R.* servers, specifically the preferred Team Deathmatch server, were full. Usually, that would be a good thing. In this case, it was a bad thing because not a single person on the server was from South Africa, or even *IN* South Africa. Instead, the server was full of Europeans, mostly French. The locals, for whom the server was set up, could not join because of all the foreigners on it. Now, considering SAIX hosts these local game servers to save themselves (and even perhaps make themselves) money, what exactly is the point of letting international players fill the server, denying the local gamers a place to play with reasonable pings. SAIX admitted that they host the game servers they do, to prevent power-gamers from using international bandwidth, thus saving SAIX money. If they host a server, which international players can join, isn't that defeating the object? Surely, it cannot be a technical issue - setting up allowed/denied IP ranges for

a server is something a small child can do, on Linux even.

When the local players could finally join, they found that not only was the server full of people who could not even speak English, but most were using exploits and hacks to make the experience unbearable. The response from the SAIX administrators about this problem was the usual "We can't do anything about it." The players using exploits and/or hacks could not be voted out of the server, due to the 'callvote nextmap' exploit that prevents players from taking matters into their own hands.

However, as always, the majority of local gamers are content to be beggars, and not choosers. In general, they are content to simply take what they are given and "be happy about it," because let's face it: why bother doing a good job when it's a 'free service'?

Therefore, our plea to SAIX is this simple request:

If you say you're going to host servers for South Africans, please host servers for South Africans, and try not to be awful at it in the process. **NAG**

(The opinions expressed herein are combined feelings from the local community, along with our own consternation about the state of the local servers, and is not necessarily that of NAG and its team of lawyer badgers. SAIX administrators were contacted for their opinion, but at the time of writing no response had been received.)

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WHAT IS SECOND LIFE?

www.secondlife.com

FOR MMO THIS MONTH, we'll be taking a look at an online 'game' that has been appearing in the news a lot lately, and enjoying bolstered media coverage as well as a recent plague of flying penises.

But first, a little history about this growing phenomenon. *Second Life* is a subscription-based online 3D world, created and run by Linden Lab. You can sign up for a free account, but the whole driving force behind *Second Life* is content creation, which you cannot access unless you pay a monthly fee. In *Second Life*, players can explore the virtual worlds created by other people, participate in group activities, and even create their own avatars, cars, animals, houses, etc. - pretty much anything you can think of, you can create inside the game using the built-in modelling tools. Things you create inside *Second Life* can be sold for virtual Linden Dollars (LD), and the entire economy operates as a free market. The most surprising aspect (shared by few online worlds), is that the virtual Linden Dollars can be exchanged for real US dollars. When you subscribe to *Second Life*, you become a Resident. Residents can buy and sell to one another, and even purchase

plots of land on which to build. Land is vital, because you cannot build things to sell without owning some property. Property, once bought, has a certain weekly upkeep, which you will either have to pay real money for, or earn enough in-game virtual money to sustain it. Literally thousands of people are earning a living in *Second Life* - enough to both sustain their *Second Life* accounts and pay the real-world bills. Don't quit your day job just yet though - earning enough money in *Second Life* to make a living off it requires a lot of hard work, and the ability to create content that players would want to buy. There are around ten to twenty thousand people on *Second Life* at any given time, and over two million people are registered. What makes *Second Life* so interesting is that it has no real defined goals other than what you give yourself. There are groups of Residents who work together to create fun interactive games to play inside the world, such as tank battles or even fully-fledged RPGs.

Businesses have recently jumped on the *Second Life* bandwagon, opening virtual offices inside the game world. Recently, CNET followed suit, and

opened a *Second Life* headquarters and was set to interview a Resident, Ansche Chung, who made an obscene amount of money through *Second Life*. Shockingly (though not unsurprising, considering the nature of *Second Life*), the interview was bombarded with virtual penises from unidentified assailants in the audience. The CNET reporter conducting the interview was powerless to stop the attack, and eventually the whole thing was scrapped. The 'griefers' (known collectively only as Room 101, a place introduced in the novel *1984* by George Orwell) were never caught, and even managed to crash the servers later when the interview was restarted.

In a virtual world such as *Second Life* where the freedom to do anything and create anything is paramount, situations where users abuse this power are not uncommon, and will remain something Linden Labs will have to think hard about on how to manage. There are concerns that *Second Life* is a bubble that may pop one day (one can only imagine the fallout from something such as that, as people have invested literally millions of dollars into it), but it is still too early to tell. **NAG**



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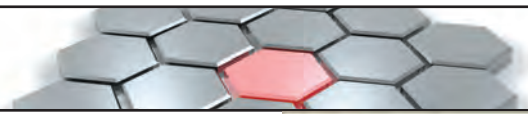
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ADVANCED INHERITANCE TRICKS

EVEN THOUGH WE'VE TOUCHED ON THE GAME MAKER IMPLEMENTATION OF OBJECT-ORIENTATED INHERITANCE BEFORE, THERE'S A LOT MORE TO IT THAN HAS BEEN COVERED. IF USED CORRECTLY, INHERITANCE CAN SAVE YOU HUGE AMOUNTS OF TIME AND EFFORT AS YOU WORK ON YOUR GAMES.

INHERITANCE IN A NUTSHELL

AS COVERED BEFORE, INHERITANCE in GM allows objects to 'inherit' actions and events from other 'parent' objects. Simply put, this means that you can produce many objects that behave in similar ways without having to duplicate huge amounts of scripting or effort. In this series, we've used exactly this ease of reproduction to create objects that use different sprites, but still react identically on screen.

We've also made extensive use of another benefit of inheritance in Game Maker: child objects can be treated as though they were parent objects instead. In many programming languages, this means that objects of one type can be 'cast' to another parent type and their methods and variables are made accessible in this way. This allows programmers to deal with situations where they don't know what exact object type they're getting, although this is purely done at a code level... Thankfully, GM's simplified system means that we don't have to deal with all the gory details that pointers and casting create. We can simply rely on GM to treat child objects as though they were parents in the situations where it matters: collision tests, iterating through groups and generally dealing with large numbers of instanced objects.

MAKING INHERITANCE WORK FOR YOU

Using parenting to your advantage can take some getting used to. In general, it helps to understand exactly what it is you wish to achieve in any particular situation in your game and then see if any of the uses of inheritance could make your life any easier. Typically, the 'I should be using inheritance!' light should come on if you find that you need to manually duplicate a lot of events across different (but conceptually

A prime candidate for optimisation: Obstacle should be a parent class!

related objects), or when you find yourself creating many events on one object, just to deal with all the different ways it could be triggered (collision events often make you do that). The two types of problems translate neatly to the two approaches to inheritance. Here's how:

Because inheritance happens at the level of events, when you find yourself copy-pasting an entire event from one object to many others, you'd be much better off simply creating a parent object type. Stick the event you're copy-pasting in there and have your child objects inherit from the parent, making sure that they don't have any of their own code in that event themselves. That's it, problem solved. No more copying! Moreover, the best part is that if you find some sort of bug or need to change that event for any other reason; you only need to change it in one place instead of on all the objects that use it.

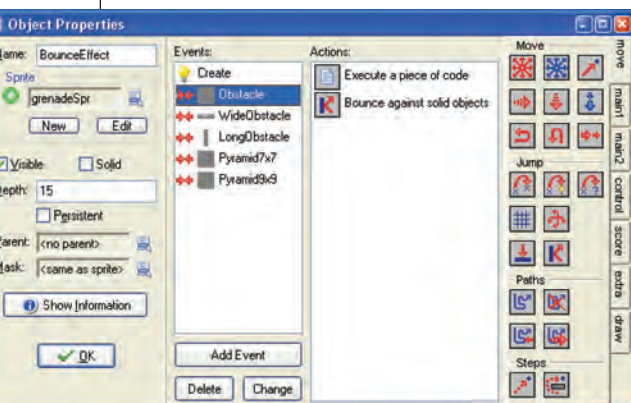
However, that only lets us duplicate exact behaviours. What if an object needs to behave the same way as its parent, but then needs to do different things in the same event? A good example of this would be where an object inherits a *Step* event from its parent to let it move in a particular way, but you want it to create a trail effect as it moves, which the parent doesn't do. Instead of duplicating code, simply give the child a *Step* event and stick in a *Call the inherited* event action (found in the Control tab), followed by the trail code. *Call the inherited* event is wonderfully useful, especially in large inheritance hierarchies where its use in Create events lets each level of the hierarchy set up its own variables without having to worry about all the other variables the object's inherited events need.

That takes care of creating the same event across multiple objects. However, what about multiple identical events in a single object? Collision events always seem to do exactly that, usually because you've set up a collection of objects that are similar (a bunch of enemies, for instance, that each does slightly different things to keep the player on their toes) and now you need to make the player's bullets damage each one correctly. That usually means a collision event for each one, unless you set up a parent object (i.e. Enemy) and only have collision code for that. All the objects that use that object as their parent (no matter how far down the hierarchy, it could well be the parent of the parent of their parent) will trigger that single collision event.

Most 'base' parent classes that are used for grouping tend to be empty and don't have any events of their own, but hopefully you will have realised that in our example, Enemy might be able to set up a few variables that would be common for all its children, health, or shields, for example.



Inheritance in Game Maker relies on an object's Parent field



This type of inheritance can be used anywhere GM uses an object type: the infamous **with** statement; **instance_nearest(x, y, obj)**; etc.

LEAVING ROOM FOR SPECIALISATION

As object hierarchies get more and more complex (as your games get bigger and better), you'll run across situations that feel like they could benefit from inheritance in two directions... That sounds confusing. Here's an example with our Enemy from above:

Imagine that you have a setup that uses a base Enemy object for collisions with the player's bullets. It works great until you decide to create multiple types of bullets that the player can fire. You're smart and create a Projectile object to act as the parent for the collection of bullets. Projectile has a single collision event with Enemy that deals damage, no matter which particular child of Enemy or Projectile collided. Children of Projectile can use *Call the inherited event* in their own Enemy collision events to create individual effects as they hit them, or any other logic you'd care to insert.

However, what happens when you want each particular child of Enemy to have its own response to the collision? Maybe different enemies give off different particle effects or maybe their AI changes differently. The problem is that because the collision code is being called on Projectile, you're stuck with nothing to inherit from the 'Enemy side'. You're almost forced to give each Enemy its own collision event with Projectile that enemies inherit from to execute their unique code... almost forced. Instead of creating multiple avenues of inheritance, you can use a neat trick in the form of **event_perform(event type, event)**.

USER EVENTS

You may have noticed the *Other* section in the events menu. If you haven't taken a look at it yet, now would be a good time - in particular the *User Defined* events, *User 0* through *User 15*. These are the so-called user events, events that aren't called by GM, but manually by you instead. They're a place to keep special-purpose or otherwise isolated code for situations such as our example...

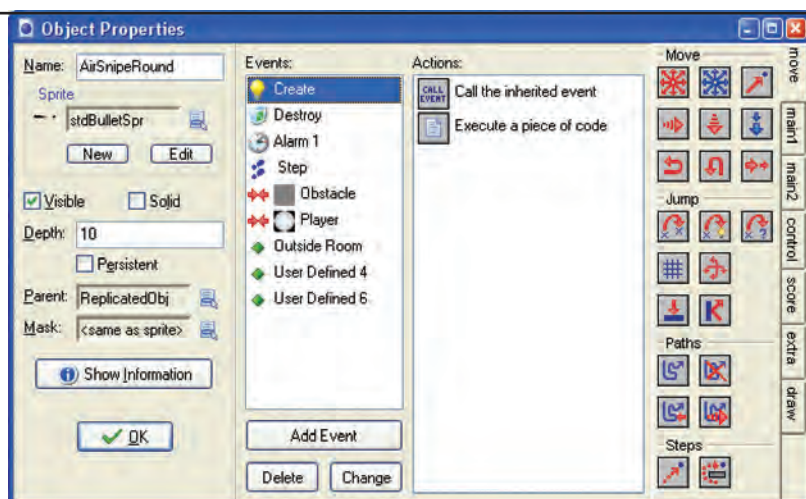
In which you're stuck with duplicating code whichever way you look at it, even if you put the damage-dealing code into Enemy on collision with Projectile, instead of the current Projectile colliding with Enemy.

Using *event_perform()* in conjunction with user events, we can create a way out of our double-inheritance nightmare. All we need to do is to place the unique 'when hit by a Bullet' code into *User 0* on each child of Enemy, and in Projectile's collision event use *Execute a piece of code* set to apply to **other** instead of **self**, containing "**event_perform(ev_other, ev_user0)**". Now, whenever a Projectile collides with an Enemy, damage is dealt, followed by the specialist code in the child of Enemy's *User 0* event, followed by the specialist code in the child of Projectile's collision event. No more event duplication!

Triggering user events in this way is a very powerful mechanism with a wide range of applications. It can be used to deal with any situation where you would want a specialised response at an object level, instead of using individual scripts (that would need to be called via duplicated events anyway).

DYNAMIC INHERITANCE

Dynamic inheritance is another instance where user events come in handy. The core of dynamic inheritance is that we want



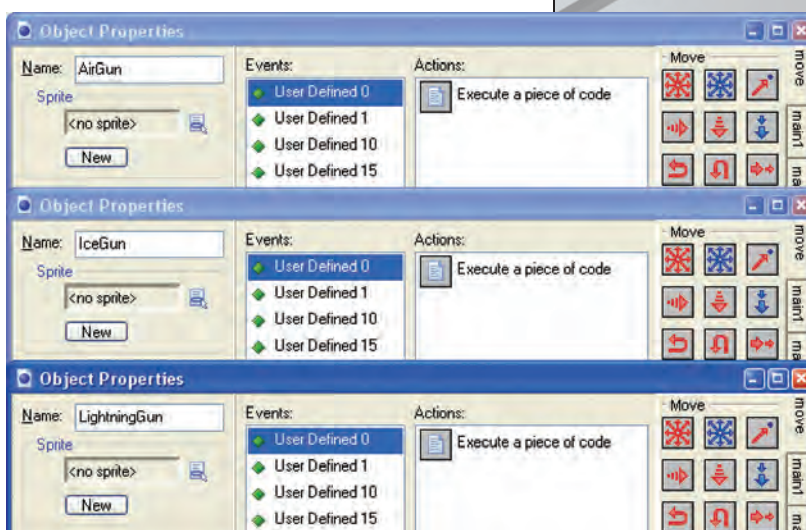
an object to act as though it inherits behaviours from different parent objects throughout the course of a single game. We can't simply change the object's parent variable; instead we use **event_perform(obj, event type, event)** and store the particular object type to use in a variable.

Using something like **event_perform(parentGun, ev_other, ev_user0)** will execute the code in the *User 0* of the object type pointed to by parentGun. If parentGun is set to MachineGun, whose *User 0* spews out a steady stream of bullets, that's what gets called. If parentGun is set to SniperRifle instead, SniperRifle's *User 0* is executed... Hopefully you can see where this is going. That's right, it makes both adding new weapons and switching them during gameplay as easy as pie. The best part is that this doesn't even require MachineGun or SniperRifle to even be instances in the current game - they're objects that are never really 'in the game', only their events are used.

Once you wrap your head around it, dynamic inheritance becomes a technique that can bring incredible flexibility to your games, allowing users to define their own keys in games, extending object hierarchies almost indefinitely, enabling complex AI, or randomly generated unique items in a game, the list is endless. **NAG**

In this example you can see examples of Calling an inherited event and User events

These objects are all used in a dynamic inheritance structure. Note the lack of Creation events and all here the exact same structure of User events



game.dev
It's what you wish you were doing.

PHONE

Cast: Ha Ji-Won, Eun Suh-Woo

Director: Ahn Byong Ki

Genre: Horror

Rating: 16

WHILE INVESTIGATING A SEX scandal, a reporter is harassed by someone trying to persuade her to stop her inquiries. She changes homes and phone numbers to avoid the harassment, but she still receives strange phone calls. However, these don't appear to be from her stalker, but something much more bone chilling.

The Movie: While Japanese horrors have Western studios mesmerised, South Korea has not been standing back, either. *The Eye*, released the same year as *Phone*, could be seen as more original, since *Phone* lifts its formula from the very popular *Ringu* (*The Ring*). However, it's better paced than any of those movies, and audiences might appreciate the more straightforward plot. Yes, it's quite possible that you might figure it out before the movie lets the cat out of the bag, but odds are



that if you enjoyed *The Grudge*, *Dark Water* and any other Far Eastern horror from the past few years, you're not going to watch this for the plot. *Phone* is full of creepy, scary ghostly horror.

The DVD: Tartan is a brilliant label for foreign movies, because all its releases have all the must-haves: commentary, interviews, making-of and more.

HOODWINKED

Cast: Patrick Warburton, Anne Hathaway, Glenn Close

Director: Cory Edwards

Genre: Comedy

Rating: A

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD decides to go to Grandma, but finds the Wolf in her bed and Grandma tied up in her closet. At that exact moment, a woodsman smashes through the window screaming. Clearly, the wolf had tied up grandma and wanted to eat Red Riding Hood, but the woodsman saved her. Or is that the real story? And who has been destroying the local goodies trade? By interviewing all the suspects, a detective tries to solve the mystery.

The Movie: More and more people are bemoaning how many computer-animated films are being released. Yes, there's a glut, but it has also brought CG technology to such a level that smaller projects also started to appear. *Valiant* was a not-so-*valiant* effort in this arena, but *Hoodwinked* has all the aces in its hands. Sure, it's no Pixar in looks, style, or writing, but it's not trying to be either. Instead,



it's a spoof on fairy tales with screwball humour and the best hyperactive squirrel ever seen (*Over The Hedge* chokes in his dust). Patrick Warburton, the voice of oh so many great animated characters, is the wolf – another great reason to see this.

The DVD: Commentary, deleted scenes, a making-of and a music video.



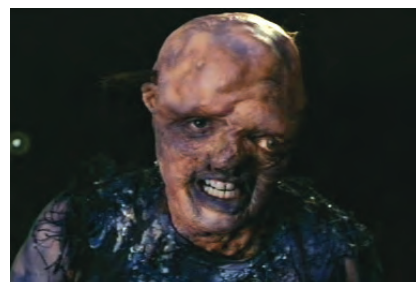
ATTACK OF THE KILLER TOMATOES

Genre: Comedy

Rating: PG

Tomatoes suddenly start attacking the people of America! While usually tasty and great for pizza, in this movie genetically-altered tomatoes from (apparently) a government lab start eating people, prompting the President and his advisors to create a special task force to stop this red menace. Meanwhile, a young reporter gets her first break to uncover the story. However, will they be able to stop the killer tomatoes? This classic spoof film is nearly 30 years old and extremely low budget, so unless you are a fan of spoof films it might be a bit inane. But most people are fans of spoof films.

The DVD: Commentary, a feature, deleted scenes and sing-along for the soundtrack.



THE TOXIC AVENGER

Genre: Cult

Rating: 18

A high school student, constantly bullied by his peers, accidentally falls into toxic waste, and becomes a one-geek revenge machine. This is the flagship movie from Trauma, the company also responsible for *Tromeo & Juliet*, *Nuk'em High* and *Cannibal: the Musical* – the latter being the student film of *South Park*'s creators. Typical of a Trauma movie, it's low budget, quite violent and very ridiculous. Serious fans can dig around for a collector's edition, but this movie-only version is already entertaining.

The DVD: Only a photo gallery.



JTHM: Director's Cut

Format: Graphic Novel

Publisher: Slave Labor Graphics

Writer/Artist: Jhonen Vasquez

Retail Price: R194.95

JOHNNY THE HOMICIDAL MANIAC is not for everybody. It's loud, angry, and violent, and has explicit in your face brutality that will give your teddy bear nightmares. It's also hilarious. There will be people who will read all sorts of deep, dark, psychological messages in this one, but for the most part that's exactly what it's poking fun at. So here it is, time to feed the mass murderer inside your subconscious...



Batman: Welcome to Tranquility # 1

Format: Comic Series | **Publisher:** Wildstorm | **Writer:** Gail Simone | **Artist:** Neil Googe
Retail Price: R24.95

SUPERHEROES GET OLD TOO, and where do they go when they get old? To the small, quiet town of Tranquility, where they can live out the rest of their days in peace. However, as reporter Collette Pearson is about to discover, perhaps things aren't always that tranquil in the town of Tranquility. This comic gets off to a great start in its look at the stereotypical heroes of old (subtly letting us know how much comics have changed), but it's told in a wacky present day style.



Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Format: Comic Miniseries (Preview) | **Publisher:** Dark Horse | **Writer:** Joss Whedon
Artist: Georges Jeanty | **Retail Price:** Not yet available

JOSS WHEDON, THE CREATOR of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* TV series, as well as the popular *Angel* and *Firefly* series, picks up the Buffy story where he left off in the hit TV series. There is now an organised army of slayers stamping out the undead, until an old enemy shows up again and breaks their stride. Don't miss this story; it's bound to be a great ride for all Buffy fans.



Batman Confidential #1

Format: Comic Series | **Publisher:** DC | **Writer:** Andy Diggle | **Artist:** Whilce Portacio
Retail Price: R24.95

THIS NEW SERIES OF Batman sees Bruce Wayne (aka Batman) battling with the two different aspects of his life: as Batman, disillusioned with having to mop up after the villains strike, and who wants to be able to stop them before they start; and as Bruce Wayne, the billionaire who is bidding against Lexcorp for a contract for the Defence Department.



CHAOS, PANIC, DISORDER (... MY WORK HERE IS DONE!)

IT IS THAT TIME of the year again, for the first time this year – the release of a new Magic: The Gathering expansion set. Planar Chaos is part 2 (of 3) of the Time Spiral block, and as such is the smallest set in the block. A brief recap: the Time Spiral story returns to Dominaria, where countless magical wars and cataclysms have resulted in the unravelling of the space-time continuum. Temporal rifts are opening spontaneously, and creatures and beings from other times are stepping through. History is losing its linear nature.

This month, I shan't yet be looking at the set as a whole. Rather, I would like to focus on one card, and explore its implications. Here it is:



Of those of you who have not yet seen or heard of this card, many are likely thinking "what the...!" Yes – a black Wrath of God. In fact, the card is a complete homage to that white staple. Besides the fact that it costs the same mana (though in a different colour) and uses the same timing (sorcery), it is also illustrated by Kev Walker, who did the art for the modern (7th, 8th and 9th Edition) Wrath of God. And, the general composition is very similar.

So here is the dilemma: Wrath of God, with its board-clearing ability, has been a white staple since time immemorial, and it might be argued that Damnation steps on sacred toes. However, its indiscriminate massacring ability fits well with black's philosophy, and is not entirely without

precedent – just consider mass removal spells such as Infest, Massacre, Decree of Pain and Plague Wind. Such 'colour bleeding' has been witnessed in Magic before. Take, for example, the introduction of Naturalize, which had white players in an uproar about green 'poaching' its Disenchant territory (I was one of these protesters), and which to this day bothers some old-schoolers. Then, white was given green's mass removal of enchantments in the form of Tempest of Light, an instant-speed version of Tranquility. Black's Howl from Beyond went to red in the form of Enrage. The list goes on. Wizards of the Coast made these adjustments in order to balance what they refer to as the 'color pie' (American spelling intentional!), which dictates what share of Magic abilities and properties each of the colours gets, and tries to keep it consistent with each colour's

basic philosophy.

The Time Spiral block, with its nostalgia and 'trip down memory lane' theme, messes with the colour pie to some extent. Disenchant has been reprinted (officially 'time shifted', actually), along with over a hundred other cards, many of which cut against the grain of current colour definitions. My question, in the end (and after much beating around the bush) is this: does Damnation benefit the game, or harm it? I have seen and heard mixed responses to this card from friends and other players – some love it, some hate it, and a few, like me, are sitting on the fence (though I'm definitely leaning in a particular direction that I shan't reveal). I would welcome your comments. I would like to know what

you think about Damnation, regardless of whether you feel strongly about it. Drop me a line at alex.jelagin@tidemedia.co.za.

SCRIVING THE SYNERGIES

This month, the spotlight is on Grave Pact. For a long time now, this has been one of my favourite ways to get more out of self-sacrificial creatures, and to punish my opponent for killing my minions. Generally speaking, there are two reasons to intentionally sacrifice one of your own creatures: the first is to proactively gain some benefit that exceeds the cost of giving up a creature; the second is to reactively salvage something when a creature is about to die anyway. An example of the first is sacrificing saproling tokens to an unblocked Fallen Angel, potentially delivering a killing blow to the opponent. An example of the second is sacrificing a Putrefy target to a Claws of Gix, to turn a dying creature into a point of life. Now, with a Grave Pact in play, each time you do either, your opponent also loses a critter! Good companions to Grave Pact include: the Eidolons from Dissension, Perilous Forays, Nantuko Husk, Skeletal Vampire (very good, reusable synergy!), Shambling Shell, Grave Shell Scarab, Teysa, the Rusalkas from Guildpact, Ghost Council of Orzhova, Dread Return (flashback) and Thallids – and this list is far from comprehensive. Older cards open up all sorts of options, like Innocent Blood and Barter in Blood, Fallen Angel and Goblin Bombardment. The main difficulty with Grave Pact is its very black-mana-intensive casting cost, which generally renders it unusable in decks with more than two colours.





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GAME OVER

EPILOGUE

THE EPILOGUE OF THE EPILOGUE

BY THE TIME YOU read this, I will already be dead. I, Percius F. Epilogue, have decided to end my existence. My reasons for departing this mortal coil are many, but the largest influence would probably be the change. There have been many changes here around the Tide Media MegaComplex Offices - even the building itself was recently relocated by the use of 10,000 Egyptian slaves to a more scenic locale. So now, high atop the Andes mountain range, I decide to end it all. But before I go, I think I should mention a few things.

I really did like those little talks we used to have. I regaled you with some stories about the NAG office, like when James lost his car keys inside that hippo, and you'd laugh. I enjoyed the pie you would bake as an offering - fresh elderberries, the delectable scent wafting throughout the entire building. But things change, y'know. People change.

All of a sudden, it was all like, "This year is going to be the best!", and everyone was like, "Yeah! The best!" Suddenly people started working harder, putting in more hours, more effort, and more personal time. Some people even brought their toddlers to work, leaving them in small tribes around the water-cooler with a few leaving the camping grounds, heading out to hunt in packs.

So much has changed, and I just can't be there to change along with it. And so, auld lang syne dear readers. You were my best.

And so, I step off this precipice and plummet down into the custardy depths below...



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And today the president closed the nation's last remaining submarine base at Groton, Connecticut. When asked why he had made the startling decision the president responded, "Those funny little black ships just keep sinking anyway."





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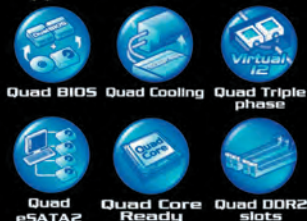


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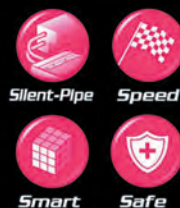
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